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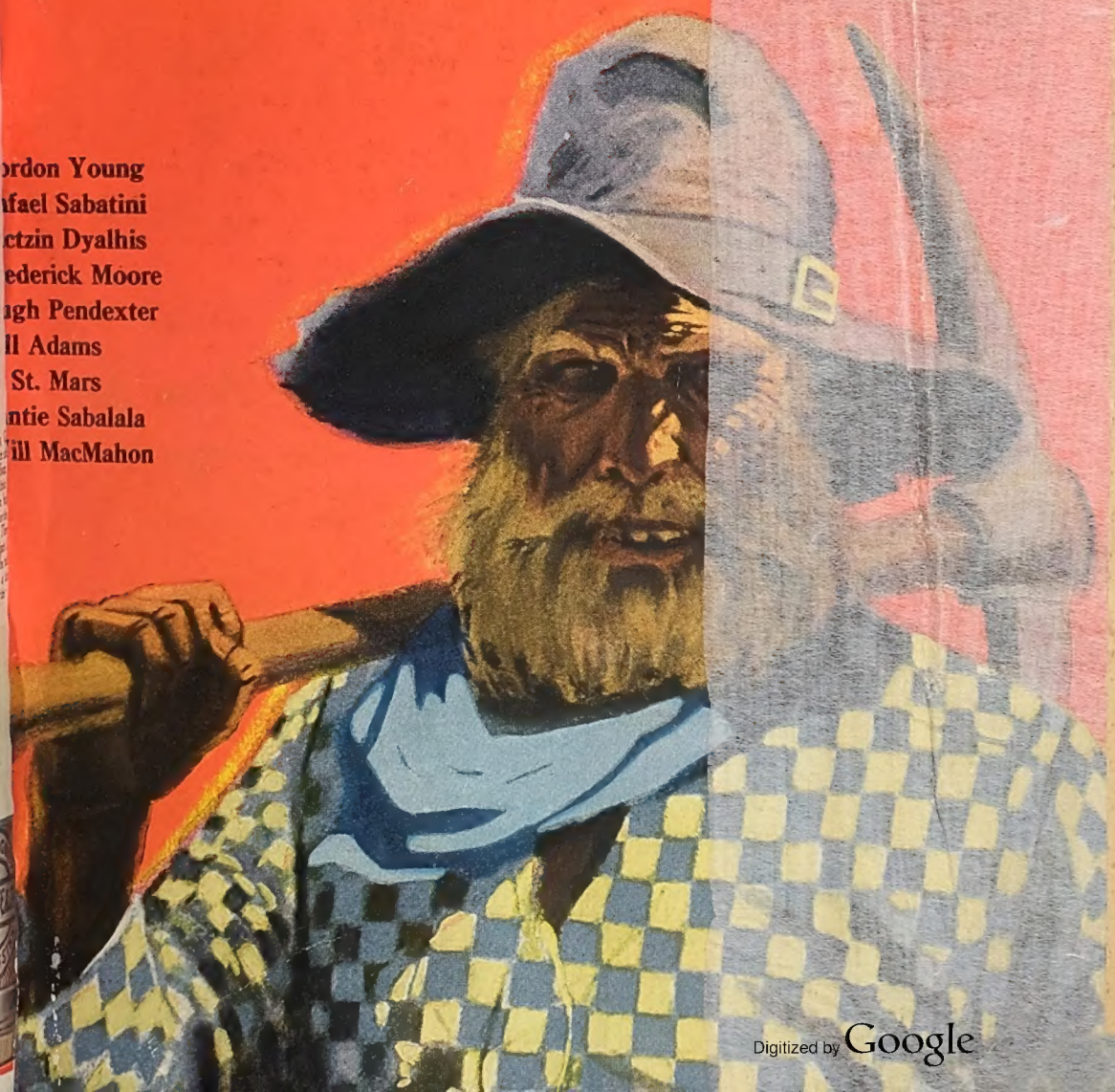

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# "You've Gone Way Past Me, Jim"

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FIGHTING against storms that sweep their South Sea island, tearing away what little of civilization they had established; fighting against the loneliness and a hatred of themselves brewed by the hopeless confinement of their ocean barrier; *Bret*, *Professor Harland* and *Malone* carry on the struggle to establish modern life, working with tools and means that are those of the Stone Age.

And somewhere beyond the horizon of the sea the catamaran *Hope*, with its crew lying prone on the sun-warped deck, is drifting into the lanes of ocean steamers. "THE ISLAND," being the further adventures of "The Barehanded Castaways," by J. Allan Dunn, complete in the next issue.

*Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.*

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**Don't forget the dates of issue for *Adventure*—the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**



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*Author of "Shipwreck," "Crooked Shadows," etc.*

## CHAPTER I

*My friend had loved a woman; that is to say, he had given himself in pawn to the Devil.*

THE room was quiet. Candles white as a dead woman's limbs lifted motionless fingers of flame. A huge mirror, framed with ebony, was set into the wall across from me; the frame was carved and inlaid with silver traceries of fantastic design. Flowering brambles entwined broken skeletons, and goat-limbed men climbed upward after playful girls. Underneath in embossed Gothic letters was the ironic legend—

*Vanitas, Omnia Vanitas.*

The great mirror caught up all that was in the room and gave it unsubstantial body—a shadow substance floating against the silver coating behind the glass; but, after all, the forms and shadows that dance across a mirror's surface are not much more fleeting and perishable than the bodies and trappings moving over the earth's surface.

Zoronna, known as The Sorceress, known too as "the most wicked of women"—a reputation acquired with some difficulty for publicity value—leaned heavily on her folded arms and stared at me across the broad top of the black table. She loved luxury as a cat loves silk, but to her nothing was luxurious unless grotesque or, at least, bizarre.

A coronal of jewel colors—perhaps studded with real jewels—was fastened about her red, flamingly red, hair; and a black aigret sprayed into vapor thinness above her head. She used up enough money to have supported a queen, and used most of it in wilful adornment, the rest in furnishings. The floor under our feet was a checkerwork of rare woods, arranged into some kind of intricate design with much labor and cost; but the design was carelessly hid and broken by the spread of rugs—scarlet and black rugs, all silken.

"You are wrong—*wrong*—to try to treat me this way, Don."

She seemed at once saddened and menacing. There was reason for the sadness. She was about to become a hunted woman, with every policeman's hand snatching at her silk-covered shoulders, or else march off to prison like a sorrowing Magdalen and hope to win a pardon by her humbled beauty; but hers was the sort of beauty that perishes when it is humbled.

"I am your friend," she said slowly, her eyes slumbrously half-veiled; but in her tone was the hint: But beware if I cease to be!

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"Calversley is my friend—and he is still in San Quentin. If you had got him out, or tried to get him out—but you haven't."

"You are unjust. And always I have liked you, Don."

"Which is the more reason I should distrust you."

She lifted her head questioningly, anger and doubt in her purple eyes.

"You *loved* him."

Impatiently she answered: "I never. I did not. I was grateful. That isn't love. I told him over and over."

"You let him go to prison, which isn't the sweetest way in the world of showing—what did you call it? Gratitude?"

"But he was guilty!"

She struck the table with the palm of her jeweled hand.

"I have told you over and over and over how it was! Bob Calversley killed him—I didn't do it. You say I did it. Didn't he plead guilty?"

"Calversley loved you. Unfortunately he is a gentleman and will lie any time to shelter a woman.

"Don Everhard, you *know* he did it! And he is *not* a gentleman—he sent word that I shouldn't come near him."

"And you were glad to have the excuse to stay away. *You* are going to confess to that killing."

Her eyes blazed.

"Never!"

"Don't say, 'Never' to me. You are going to write as I dictate, and call in somebody to witness the signature. Then you can do as you please—deny it, run and hide, or——"

"Or what?"

"Or get a lot of praise from the world and sympathy from the judge by pretending that you have done it for love. It will give you a lot of publicity."

Her teeth clicked, and I thought that I could hear them grind. Her jeweled fingers wrapped themselves into fists as she pushed herself back from the table and sat in silent defiance. Again, as two or three times before, her eyes shifted from my face, past me, toward the entrance hung with black curtains, brocaded with gold. Over her head, in the mirror, I could see that doorway as well as she could.

Indignant, but not raising her voice, she said—

"And I thought you my friend."

"No. I was a friend to Calversley. You were always into some mess or other and he was always pulling you out. If I helped at all, it was Calversley—not you."

With eyes adroop and voice drooping even more she said:

"It is cruel of you to say that. I had thought——"

The unfinished sentence faded into a sigh.

"Are you trying to play the coquette?"

"No!"

It came with angry flare.

"I merely wondered. You used to boast that you were a tiger-woman——"

"And you, Don Everhard Richmond—beware of my claws!"

She raised her hands with fingers apart and curved tensely; but she smiled friendlily. Zoronna Symondi was an actress.

"If you hadn't left Calversley in prison——"

"What could I do?"

"— never went near him, never wrote or sent a message——"

"Oh, I did think of him. I was so unhappy for months I couldn't sleep!"

"But you came off here to New York and rapidly consoled yourself. I am trying to make you understand, Miss Symondi, that if you had not deserted him completely, if you had shown even a trace of love, or just a little gratitude—why, then, I would say to myself: 'Calversley is getting what he paid for. She loves him; so it is none of my business what the fool does with his life.' "

Zoronna scrutinized me intently. Every man has a weak spot. She knew that. Some are so spotted that they look like leopards. Her tone was softly pleading as she said:

"Don, I know you are the last man in the world who would make an innocent person suffer for the guilt of another. Bob killed that man. Before God, the facts are just as I have told you."

I told her I was not interested in the facts.

"Oh!"

"The facts may be as you have said; but the truth is you are guilty."

It was with more alarm that this time she cried—

"Oh!"

"The dead man's name—one of them—like many of your friends, Miss Symondi, he had an alias or two—his name was de Gasparin!"

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She quivered under the blow. That name had not at all come out in the trial. She bowed her head, but from under her long black lashes watched me with viperous intensity.

"Now, Miss Symondi, I know all that de Gasparin knew. Who are you going to have kill me?"

She answered with a strange, maddened cry, and sprang up, overturning the heavy chair behind her. Her eyes blazed, and one of her jeweled hands swung upward to her breast. I turned and shot. I never have hesitated to leave my back unguarded so long as a mirror was in front; and, watchful, I had seen the curtains move, then part; the glint of blued steel struck into the glass, and the fellow's gun exploded futilely as my bullet hit him. He lurched staggeringly into the room, reeled, slipped, and went down like a drunken man on ice. He was dead.

I looked from him to Zoronna. She had reached the end of the wide black table, and with her body half-turned shrinkingly, stared across at the dead man. Her gown was of black, overlaid with silver scales that shimmered and shivered; and I thought her not unlike some fish-bodied siren of ancient fable that with beauty and song drew men to death. I said to her:

"You called him and he came. Now when your servants come——"

She shook her head, meaning they would not come—that she was alone.

"I see. There was to be no witness. You and this unlucky man would tell what story you pleased over my dead body?"

Her jeweled fingers gripped the edge of the table, her eyes closed, she leaned forward heavily and said unevenly:

"It is not true! It is not true! Oh, every thing I do goes twisted and ends unhappily. I swear—I swear before God!"

"Then why was he there, and armed?"

Zoronna opened her purple eyes wearily, and the fiery light in them burned low:

"From childhood I have known that whoever loved me was cursed. That poor fellow—when I told him you were coming, he could see that I was afraid. He said—this is just what he said, 'I'll give that cheap gambler the scare of his life.' I warned him——"

I looked again toward the body, huddled down in death, where a growing blood smear edged its way cryptically over the tesselated floor.

"He knew me?" I asked; and she closed her eyes, answering, "Yes" with the drop of her lids.

I went across the room and stooped down, looking into the face that had mouth open and eyes wide in much the sort of expression that a man has when he slips at the edge of a cliff and falls.

"You call the affection that he had for you—*love?* Or did he give you the money that bought this—" I gestured from the inlaid floor to the frescoed ceiling. "In San Francisco he had plenty of money and people wondered how he got most of it. 'Blackmail,' some said."

"I never took a dollar of his money—of any man's——"

She broke off. I watched her and said nothing. Irritated, embarrassed, distressed—

"You know what I mean."

I shook my head. Zoronna threw up her head stiffly. The black aigret wavered like a plume of smoke, she was so vibrantly intense as she answered in restrained rage:

"I never let any man think he could buy me—buy—" she measured the first joint of a forefinger—"that much of me. I hate men. You know it. I hate you. Whatever I have taken I have taken with my claws!"

Her hands were outspread, claw-like, illustrative of her rapacity. Sardonically I told her that even the female tiger loved her *cub*, and for some odd reason, either my manner of saying it, or the misused word, struck fire.

"What do you mean?" she demanded challengingly, with hurried breathlessness.

I had meant nothing except to be disagreeable, but when I saw her disconcerted intensity I stood in silence, eyeing her with a shadowy smile as if I knew as much or more than she feared. It isn't what you know, but what you can make other people think you know that counts as much in a gambler's life as in a professor's.

"You—you are a vicious, meddlesome—a—murderer!" she cried at me, a shimmering hand dramatically thrust through the candle-light toward the dead man, and the silver scales on her black gown rustled vibrantly.

"Shh-hh-h," I warned her coldly with just enough mockery to make her quiver.

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"If you talk too loud de Gasparin's ghost may be awakened, and you will hear it laugh. Let me see. Zoronna now, is it?"

She made no answer, but eyed me with sullen doubtfulness.

I went on:

"It has been Zeela, Zoa, Zenola, Zenobia, too? Anyway, always there is something zizzling in your aliases. It's a sort of symbolism with you. A cross between zip and sizzling. De Gasparin, I admit, was a leech of a fellow, an uncouth, rascally blackmailer. You should have been more careful whom you permitted to share your secrets."

Zoronna trembled. Her lips, red as blood, were between her sharp white teeth. She trembled, but there was more anger than fear—though fear overflowed her heart.

"You can prove nothing!" she said with low tense voice, stubbornly.

"Granted that de Gasparin's diary, which I bought of his mistress—there was reason enough why she preferred secrecy to publicity—would not be convincing to a jury, the typical American jury, which believes a pretty woman can do no wrong—"

I stopped. Zoronna, unsteadily, as if her legs were withering, had left the table and staggered to a high-backed chair against the wall.

"Diary—diary!" she muttered.

I saw no need for telling her that there was no diary, and so far as I knew had never been one. I was putting her through an ordeal which, if the truth need be told—though it may not be believed—was almost as disagreeable to me as it was to Zoronna herself; but when I have decided that something must, or should, be done—I do it; and all other considerations, no matter what, are pushed aside. Robert Calversley was my friend, a brave, gallant, pleasant-natured young fellow who had risked himself a dozen times for me. I had been out of the country, in Paris resting quietly until some good people had quit agitating themselves over my part in a certain affair, at the time Calversley was supposed to have killed de Gasparin.

THERE had been some mystery connected with the crime. An unknown woman had visited the dead man shortly before the killing—and disappeared, no one knew how or when. Circumstantial evidence had pointed its crooked finger at Calversley, who, under pressure, confessed. He was a wonder at concealing what he knew and pretended that he did not know a thing about any woman, but got up such a good story of self-defense that the jury solved its doubts with a verdict of "manslaughter."

I knew nothing of all this until it was over. I am not one of those people who keep in touch with home-town affairs. It was only casually that I learned about the case.

A Parisienne, who had done many things that she shouldn't and regretted none of them that had been profitable, and who was only very recently back from America, picked up the news somehow and gabbled importantly, for she had known the dead man, and knew much about him. He had three or four names, but the most important was de Gasparin. A friend heard, or heard about, her chatter, and knowing of my attachment to Calversley came to me; and so, for the first time, I learned of his misfortune. I was much concerned, also wonderingly suspicious, for Calversley was no fool.

I cabled for back numbers of the *Chronicle*, but in the mean time sought out the woman who knew so much. Briefly, I paid her, and well, for what she knew. Being generous, as most Parisiennes are with gossip, I was sure she told me more than she knew; but when she had said that de Gasparin (she claimed to have known him well) once saved the pretty neck of that most distinguished actress, "Zoronna the Sorceress," and never any more was it necessary for him to jump about, putting his finger into other people's pockets—why then, I was absorbedly interested.

It was from this fair Parisienne that I for the first time heard the uncouth name Horrezko. The sound was harsh enough to have been a Biblical title for some one of the devils that were pitched headlong from heaven. With the half-gay excitement of telling something that had horror in it, she made out that this Horrezko was a sure-enough devil; and with the ecstatic agreeability that French women have, she tried to give me a picture worth my money—so Horrezko had hoofs, tail, shaggy body and horns. With a little encouragement she would have declared he could shoot fire out of his nostrils.

But to repeat all that she said would be to

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give as much imaginative gossip, faintly besprinkled with truth, as she gave me to puzzle over—without at all reproducing the effervescent vivacity which made her chirruping endurable. There was very little that she really knew, but her suspicions were active, and she had imagination; and shortly before his death she had undoubtedly had more intimacy with de Gasparin than was good for her soul. It was what he had dropped in drunken and boastful hints that she had caught up and with untrustworthy elaborateness passed on to me.

However, it was this Parisienne who gave me the clues that I followed with some persistence; and she did give me the one important fact that de Gasparin was the name of the man for whose murder Calversley had gone to prison. And I believed, I will go so far as to say, that I knew him far too clever a man to have been caught, at least so easily, if guilty. I have never known his equal for a quick brain or his superior in audacity.

I came back to America in a short time, but as there was a previous misunderstanding with certain people of authority in California, I had to use a wee bit of caution in the way that I moved about.

The first thing I did was to try to visit Calversley in prison; but the warden had recently seen fit to take away all of his privileges, so that he could not have visitors, write or receive letters. But I sent in some money, and cigarets of a brand that he was unhappy without, and a message that anybody who would take a crime off a woman's shoulders ought to be left to mildew in prison; but that having some doubt about prison fare being quite punishment enough for such folly, I hoped to see him get out where I could more fittingly attend to him.

I had no way of knowing whether the articles and message reached him, for while underground service has the advantage of being uncensored it often has the ill fortune to be delayed and suppressed; and replies cannot always be made.

After that I undertook to locate Zoronna Symondi; and this was not nearly so easy as it should have been, considering her brilliant beauty and notoriety.

A word or two about that search and my manner of meeting with her.

## CHAPTER II

*It is not crime that makes guilt; it is conscience.*

I LIKE New York about as well as a civilized man would like any other barbarian village where tom-toms beat the night through, where there is endless rush of feet, scurrying, scooting and tooting, confusion of tongues, and the vibrant sinister hum of life—like a jungle at sundown.

Throughout the whole city it is as if everybody had a high fever. Or, as if expecting Judgment Dawn on the morrow, everybody is frantically trying to sell something, beg something, swindle or steal something that would supply the copper penny the ferryman will demand for carrying the dead across the dark river; that is, everybody who is not tossing and strewing dollars around as if in desperate abandon to snatch the last pleasures of earth—as sailors have got drunk when the ship was foundering.

I know as well as any one that it is a studied insult to call New York a village. It is more like an ant-hill, one of the African ant-hills where the dirt is piled higher than it was ever piled by ants before, which makes all the insects that are born or move into the tallest, broadest hill boastful and contemptuous of all the lesser dirt piles around about.

I was there to catch one little red ant of the wrong sex, whose sting was sharp as a wasp's.

As I walked the endless streets, being jostled—I dislike being jostled—I looked searchingly at every woman, whether she was on foot or on fat rubber wheels.

I went watchfully to shows, roof gardens, to cafés, to wherever money would take a stranger and to some places where you had to be introduced by a friend who was known.

Often women I looked at stared back with bold eyes out of sickly faces, anxiously business-like; and some merely looked through and through me with that vague watchful noncommittal gaze that women have to acquire to keep from showing that they see the smirks and challenges thrown at them. Others were provocative, elusive, as if eager for the chase—and capture. Many were too tired to notice or to care if noticed. A few had frank impersonal eyes, sensitive, healthy, self-possessed.

It was a new study—women in New York.

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I had never closely looked at them before; and I learned much just from eyes and faces.

Everything I learned confirmed me in my suspicions that a wise man will let them alone; strange women especially, as all moralists advise, but more especially still, the women with whom he is acquainted. While he has been learning a little something about these—why these have been turning him inside out as though he was a purse, making notes of all that was in him, his prejudices, points of strength, the places of easier attack, everything, like clever spies in an enemy's fortress.

But I had to find Zoronna. I soon learned that she was avoiding places where she was known; and I suspected that she had put on another of her Z-names, which she changed and wore as easily as her gilt gowns.

She could no more tuck herself away in obscurity than a moth can resist plunging at a light and beating the flame with powdered wings. Like all hectic, childless women, self-conscious in beauty, giddy as drunken girls to hear men gasp as they pass, spectacular and coldly proud in poise—I knew that she, as all those women must do, would have to go some place at night where people could see her. She could no more help it than a stranded mermaid can help struggling toward the froth-crested surf.

She had written, without a return address, to Madame Hazel Guigane, who was as much her friend as Zoronna ever had among women, that she could not leave New York, though she had every wish in the world to get away; but there she was to stay—"for the *Devil* knew how long." "Devil" was underscored.

Hazel Guigane told me that she was a greatly changed Zoronna—audacious as ever, but more merciless, and with an embittered humor.

"She has never felt the warm pride of humbleness at some man's big ugly feet," said Madame Guigane, looking at me intently. "Some day—and he is sure to be a soft, half-baked boy. I have never known it to fail with girls such as she.

"But look out, Don. She's hennaed her hair, and it's changed her personality. When she finds you are going to try to make her take Bob Calversley's place in prison——"

"I'm not thinking of telling her that by letter, or over the telephone."

"Don't try to be amusing, Don. Not with your sense of humor. It is too much like a club-foot man doing a jig—pathetic. When she does find out, she will arrange, if possible, to spend some stupid man's money on a tombstone for you. She isn't the Zoronna you used to know. Moreover, something has recently hardened her.

"She had some sort of dreadful affair in New York shortly before she came West this last time. I didn't question her—I am not as meddlesome as you are; and she didn't tell me much—except that if any man ever again endangered her she was going to take pleasure in setting up a little slab for him to remember her by. Look out that it isn't: 'To Don Everhard Richmond. Gone but not forgotten. May he rest in peace—until we meet again.' She'll put something like that over you, with half a chance."

So I had come to New York and I had taken rooms in the house of a middle-aged woman who had been in prison twice, then given up shop-lifting as a bad job and gone in for that safer form of robbery which is the prerogative of landladies. Her name was Mrs. Dupper, and she was outwardly a "widow lady in reduced circumstances," turning an honest penny, poor but pernickety about her reputation. Her jaw was angular, her nose sharp; she wore high collars and carried herself with rigidly square shoulders.

I came to her with a letter from Madame Hazel Guigane; and Hazel Guigane, who never shunned friendless women, had befriended her when the world seemed like Iceland in mid-Winter; for which reason Mrs. Dupper watched over me with hawk-like vigilance, and she did the watching with blue eyes that were as coldly expressionless as ice itself.

I REALIZED that a likely place to look for Zoronna, who liked gambling as some people like wine, was in one of Delano's roulette salons.

Delano called each of his gambling places a club, and gave it an Indian name; and this was the Ojibway. The Ojibway was the only one of the clubs he had in various cities where men and women were admitted together; and by giving it a distinctive social atmosphere and keeping a close scrutiny on the admittance list, the manager—Delano was seldom seen around

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any of his places—had made a brilliant success.

Every one knows that women are more reckless gamblers than men; but that, when pretty women are at their elbows, men plunge to win admiring glances, and smile with an air of indifference at their losses. In Anglo-Saxon countries the mingling of men and women in gambling halls that have to exist under the semi-obscurity of police protection has not been fortunate.

Such places are usually exploded by scandal, or depleted by blackmail, in a short time; but the Ojibway seemed to have caught the secret of evading the rocks, and prospered under the polite appearance of a hospitable hall where roulette tables were at hand for the entertainment of guests. Dinners, wines, music, were served, all free as the perfume-sprayed air that was breathed. The furnishings were bizarre, extravagant, often changed and redecorated to give the invaluable novelty that lures pleasure-seekers.

There was no obstrusive eagerness to take money from anybody; and such generous entertainment put people in a mood to lose willingly, for they more or less wondered how the Ojibway could be so lavish—a dinner like the Ritz-Carlton's, and no bill!

I knew the inner workings of all the Indian clubs, having at one time been offered the managership of the Huron at San Francisco. A guest did not have to lose to be welcome—that is, apparently not; but he had to play; if he won, all right; some night he would lose more than he could possibly recoup, for that is the law of roulette—which, like the law of gravitation, can't be cheated and if you buck it you are sure to get bumped.

Another interesting and novel feature of the Ojibway was the privilege of being masked, extended to women but not to men. It drew extravagant women who wouldn't have risked their social reputations, but cared less about their husbands' money. Upon their arrival they were shown to a room where one or two gracious and well-informed men received and identified them; then the ladies, masked, might rejoin their escorts. The secrecy of the anteroom was inviolable, but women were not permitted to come alone; so some brought their footmen.

The footman, after losing what money his mistress had given him for play, could discreetly retire, leave, go away—or, if he pleased, risk his own bank savings. There were, I have heard, some pretty complications when one of these flunky escorts made a killing, broke a bank, or otherwise set those ladies who love a winner in a flutter; and on one occasion at least the mistress of a servant escort tried to appropriate the boy's winnings—a chauffeur, I think he was—under the not wholly absurd claim that she had not only paid him for coming but had advanced the money with which he played.

The Ojibway manager was a thorough diplomat. He induced the chauffeur to surrender his winnings, privately reimbursed him for every cent he had given up; and with his gracious blessings sent both mistress and mechanic back to the tables where, as rapidly as ill luck could aid them, they both lost everything they had, the mistress—I was told—even pawning the gown on her back to a woman who had admired it earlier in the evening.

I have always been of the opinion that if he had thought of it first the devil would have been content with gambling as a snare, and not invented sex at all.

It was such a likely place to look for Zoronna that I spent many evenings in a little balcony outside of the manager's private office, obscured by heavy draperies, and watched the men and proud vain women, glittering with jewels, parading imported dresses, with little strips of black vizards across their eyes, half-veiling their features but not their beauties, and clustering about the tables, egging men into follies great as their own.

It is hardly needful to say that some few of these women were on the pay-roll of the Ojibway, and that they weren't permitted to carry off what they won—any more than the Kaffir miners are allowed to get away with the diamonds that they dig.

One peacock in a barnyard, one diamond on black velvet, one star in the evening sky, is admired for itself; but when there are many peacocks, a pile of diamonds, a sky full of stars, it is the effect that is appreciated and individuals lose distinction. I had a slight sense of bewilderment, not unmixed with dread, a kind of vague uneasiness, to discover that there were on this earth so many women not unlike Zoronna Symondi. The world was a far more

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perilous place to live in than I had supposed; and I knew it would not be as easy to distinguish her as I had thought.

However, I did pick her out, though my selection was a guess confirmed only after some hours of almost steady watching. The excitement was visibly nerve-racking, for heavy playing went on; the air was warm; and I saw her turn aside, half furtively lift her mask and brush her forehead with a wisp of cambric.

I have more caution than most men need; and I was a little in doubt as to what she might suspect when she knew that I was at hand. I was reasonably sure that she would not take fright and run away—for without being friends we had at one time been well acquainted; and if I had not known women have no gratitude where they have never had affection, I might even have expected her to be a little kindly in her remembrance of me. But when she had let Calversley go to prison, I saw no reason why she might not wish me, who had been far less important to her, in a darker and more permanent place.

I did not go near her, but when she left I had a fellow follow and find out where she lived. In that way I knew that I could call on her even if she did try to dodge a meeting with me.

The next night when I saw she had come in, I went down, and, mingling with the crowd, came and stood within a few feet of her. From the corners of my eyes—I can almost see what goes on behind me—I saw that she gave a start as she recognized me; and I waited for her to touch my arm and reveal herself. But this she did not do; thereby I learned that she did not want me to know her, which was something that had its value. She had nothing to make her uneasy, unless it was a sort of untameable dislike that women often have for me, because there was no way she could have found out what I intended to do.

I saw that she was getting ready to leave, though she had just arrived; so I managed to come face to face with her as if by accident. I stared in recognition even at her mask.

She hesitated tremblingly for an instant, but not quite daring to try to pretend that I had made a mistake, she put out her hand with a play of welcome and said:

"How are you, Mr. Richmond? You know me?"

I told her that I did, and she asked—

"How?"

Not being gallant, I couldn't pretend that I would have known her any place or that a mask was a thin veil for her personality; so I said—

"Last evening I saw you raise your mask for a moment."

"Last evening!" she exclaimed. "I didn't see you."

"No."

"Why didn't you speak?"

"It wasn't convenient. I was about some business—up there."

"Oh!" she said doubtfully, looking toward the curtained balcony. "But where have you been? And doing what? You were in France—Hazel Guigane said. You must tell me about yourself."

"Didn't Calversley tell you, too?"

There was a faint tremor of agitation, but she dissimulated it as a stab of pain, with:

"Poor dear Bob! Wasn't it terrible!

"Yes. I would like to learn all about the case. I sent for newspapers, but news and facts aren't often the same. I would like for you to tell me what you know."

She answered quickly—

"Oh, I didn't attend the trial, so——"

Then checked herself. Suddenly she realized how fully I knew her deep debt to Calversley. Zoronna had said that it always did make her uneasy to talk to me. I may not always tell the truth, but I have a strong aversion to lying; and I then made no pretense at being affable. I am never affable. I do not like affable people.

She knew what Calversley meant to me as a friend, and, a little strained of tone, she said:

"Why surely, Don. I shall be glad, some time. Where are you stopping?"

"Where are you stopping?" I asked.

She told me, and I knew that it was her address.

"Tomorrow evening then, I will call," I told her.

"But—I'm *so* sorry. Tomorrow night I have an engagement. I am *so*——"

"What time will you be home?"

"Oh, dreadfully late!"

"About what time?"

"Not before two, anyway."

"Very well. At two. I shall be there."

"Oh I can't—not at such an hour!"

She was nervous, and it was not her nature to show her nervousness.

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"I'll meet you. I'll break that engagement. I won't go out. I'll be home—any time you say."

I thanked her and said nine o'clock.

I came at nine and nothing of real importance was said until I threw de Gasparin's name to her—and I knew nothing more accurate about de Gasparin than I have told. But I might as well tell what the facts were, as I eventually learned or guessed at them, and have that part of my story over with; and though I tell it with some flourishes and hectic coloring, I shall still probably fall short of conveying the truth in its gaudy grotesqueness.

## CHAPTER III

*True, the Devil is a tempter; but he never appears until wished for.*

NIGHT and a sleepless woman under a purple canopy, festooned with lace of gold. No light but the filtered glow of a moon through wind-spun clouds, its dim radiance on the floor.

She was trapped, caught, about to be crushed by a debauched, powerful man who broke women and flung them to the dogs when they opposed him—who did worse if they accepted him. Robust, bull-throated, inflamed, he swore that he would smite his check-book with his fountain pen, and there would spring up lawyers, witnesses full of perjury, private detectives, accusers who would fasten on her ruinous charges—baseless as a rich man's love for a stray woman and firm as a corrupt judge's allegiance to his master's purse.

This man, I call him Niss to hide the name that is still remembered, was powerful in the city—more than a pillar in the community, for the hollow of his inverted hand made the dome of Justice's Hall. He was Napoleonic in his frame-ups, and had broken business rivals as well as women weak enough to believe that he would not stoop to brutal infamy—women, unread in the history of Roman emperors, and therefore they did not know that powerful degenerates react blindly to personal grievances, and will strike a fly that annoys as hard as a giant that threatens; and Niss made it a point of brutal pride to let no woman on whom he had fastened his passion escape him unpunished.

Zoronna, perhaps a little flattered by having so big a man clutching at her skirts, and being much too sure of herself, had foolishly tried to make a toy of him. In her way she was as ruthless as he. She was a tiger woman, or thought she was; and hated men, or thought she did—at least a certain kind of man.

Too late she saw her mistake. Many a show girl, perhaps some as famous as she, has learned that big business men make love as they make war. The blazing indignation of many countries at the U-boats taught the world that all is not fair in war; but the thing called love is still fought out with bribery, treachery, false promises, mean threats, blows.

Motionless, Zoronna buried her face in a wide pillow, stuffed with feathers of northern ducks, and it seemed to her that she tasted dust. Her distress was deadening. She did not, she could not weep; but with blood that boiled foamingly through a body that lay still and chilled as marble, she waited for the night to pass. She was a desperate and dangerous woman, far from innocence, gypsy-born; but for once utterly depressed, hopeless.

A voice from far off, scarcely to be distinguished from the whisperings of vague thought, reached her.

She listened as a sleeper listens to a dream.

Again the voice, stronger, seemingly more near.

A flash of fright quivered through her. She threw herself over and plunged upright.

Across the room, by the window, in the moonlight she saw a huge formless shadow with a human head. In nightmare terror she stared.

The voice spoke again:

"As the bearer of important news, I have thus presumed upon your privacy. May I come nearer?"

It was such a strange unearthly voice that its sound did not fully make her feel that she was awake, seeing, hearing—not dreaming.

Unsteadily she demanded—

"Who are you?"

The voice, not raspingly unpleasant but strangely unhuman, was so humble, the manner of the queer creature so exaggeratedly respectful, that she sensed mockery in the reply—

"I am a friend!"

"I do not know you!" she cried.

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"I live in shadows."

"What are you doing here? How did you get in here?"

"I heard you call."

"I? Call? You?"

She rubbed at her ears and shivered. The creature bowed grotesquely.

Now it happened that Zoronna was used to the hocus-pocus of wizardry. Her own stage shows were always weird and barbaric. It was a cunning brilliant fellow, diabolically inventive, who had trained her from girlhood; and even before his death she had associated with other "magicians" —either her gypsy blood was fascinated by the black art, or she felt they were birds of her feather, and she enjoyed the intrigues and flubdubbery they practised on the world. But now she was afraid.

He looked so much like something that had escaped from the labyrinthine bowels of the earth. Besides, even yet there was some doubt as to how much of what she saw and heard was sleep-fancy, for often a dreamer will dream that he is awake. The sleep-fiends use many tricks to fool and torture the poor temporary corpse buried in blankets.

"Who are you?"

"One who will serve you," he answered.

"I do not understand!"

He came closer, moving like a crab, if a crab could move delicately. His thick legs were misshapen, his body broad and bulged behind by a hump as big as a packed knapsack; the shoulders were twisted and uneven, and his strange satanic head was set far over on one shoulder.

With the courtier humbleness that seemed to her like mockery, he said—

"Already your command has been obeyed."

"My command!" she gasped.

He bowed, bending awkwardly but obsequious.

"I do not know you! I gave no command! Am I—am I going mad?"

"Niss has been seized and is now in my dungeon!"

"Niss! Dungeon—you?"

She clutched jerkingly at her hair, trying to awaken herself. Humbly the monstrous dwarf bent his misshapen self, and the queer voice echoed sardonically gracious—

"Much sorrow has come to him."

"Oh!"

"Yes. He repents deeply."

"But what—what—has happened?"

She could not clearly see his face, but she knew that he smiled. The answer came with ironic softness—

"All the punishment that your angers suggested, and commanded, has been given."

"You—you must be mad—or is it I?"

The creature answered with a courtliness that seemed to her derisive—

"Niss has been humbled into the dirt—where you wished him!"

At one and the same time Zoronna was overridden by hope and fear. There was as much reluctance to believe for fear that it might be true as for fear that it might not be true; so she cried at him—

"What—oh, what *do* you mean?"

The queer voice answered in high-pitched monotone—

Niss has departed from the evilness of this life."

She demanded shudderingly—

"He is dead?"

"No. But he has ceased to live!"

"My God! What do you mean?"

The creature lifted his long hands in a mocking gesture of protest, saying:

"It was not to God you called when Niss threatened. It was to me!"

"Oh—who *are*——"

"I am the Devil—Horrezko!"

"Oh!"

"Yes."

"I never heard——"

"But you will hear of me again. Ah! I remembered those to whom I have been of service."

She cried:

"But what has happened? What have you done? Tell me, I beg of you. I do not understand!"

With an air of finality he said—

"Go again to sleep, and awaken believing your dreams."

And as she watched, he disappeared, noiselessly. She saw, of course, that he was moving away. She knew the door opened and that he passed through. But the quietness of it all, the unearthly shape that he had, the voice not like a human's, the mystery of what he had said and of how he had come, left her staring rigidly.

She sat through the darkness and into the dawn, afraid to move, not daring to believe and yet incapable of doubt.

Nothing was heard of Niss for several days. But as he answered to nobody for

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his movements, only his most intimate associates were troubled and, quietly, anxiously, tried to locate him. Then abruptly the news was given out from his home that he was very ill.

People who knew him well passed the word among themselves that he had probably been off on one of his terrific debauches and something inside of his head had snapped. There was much mystery about it; but the doctors, as they gladly do when well paid, covered over the case with Latin jargon which the newspapers translated as meaning a breakdown from overwork; and Niss disappeared from public view, but it was pretty well known that he had become a glazed-eyed idiot.

His relatives made a determined search into the mystery, inspired perhaps less by affection for him than by an eagerness to discover who had got hold of the big sums of money—which, since his sickness, was really their property—paid out on personal checks of a nature that the bank could not question, and cashed during his disappearance. But they went up against a mastery of net-work that entangled their detectives hopelessly. Nothing was learned.

In the midst of her relief, Zoronna was greatly troubled. Attached to the troupe she then had was de Gasparin; he was attached to it in some vague business capacity, and having accidentally stumbled in on a scene between her and Niss soon became a confidant to her desperation.

De Gasparin was a slender, sleek fellow, as much of an adventurer as the lack of personal courage and of a bold wit would allow, but who was nevertheless quite clever and had some acquaintance with the world and its darker ways. The truth is that his importance to Horrezko was about as great as that of a messenger boy who delivers a letter; and de Gasparin, like many another fellow of uncertain employment, got a bit of money by passing on to the ears of that queer creature whatever gossip, scandal and news, facts and suspicions seemed likely to interest the dwarf's omnivorous curiosity.

But he was not close enough to Horrezko to have had even the power of betrayal, however much he might have had the inclination—which he, or no one else who knew the dwarf, ever had. Certainly de Gasparin must have had an inkling of suspicion, perhaps a little something more than a suspicion, of the ferocious audacity with which that misshapen devil, like Lucifer snatching at souls, reached out and struck whoever drew his dominance upon them. Whatever the Frenchman suspected, he loved his throat too much to go to the police, but he seems to have been a rather talkative fool.

Whether de Gasparin actually did guess what had happened to Niss, or whether he undertook to make the most of what appeared to him to be a lucky misfortune, is a matter for some doubt; but anyway he made Zoronna believe that it was he, de Gasparin, who had cruelly punished the millionaire, and that Horrezko was merely his agent. He made her believe that Niss had been reduced to idiocy to keep from revenging himself terribly on her, as he knew—or thought he knew—that she had instigated his kidnaping and torture.

De Gasparin was an artist with lies. He terrified her by pointing out that there was the chance of Niss recovering his physical power and memory; and that it was only by keeping his nurse bribed to feed him a sort of poison that dulled his brain that she could be secured from Niss' wrath.

With fine hypocrisy de Gasparin pretended that all this had been done out of a high devotion for her and that if his pockets had been deep enough to meet the needs, the pressing needs of the affair, he never would have mentioned money.

Zoronna Symondi was anything but a coward; yet she was frightened and shocked. She knew nothing of what had happened beyond what de Gasparin had told her and what, censored by family lawyers, got into the papers. It is probable that de Gasparin himself did not know of the personal checks.

To Zoronna it seemed that the danger she had escaped was trivial to the disaster that now hung low over her head. Horrezko had sunk impenetrably back into shadows. There was nothing to oppose her belief in what de Gasparin chose to tell her.

Once she cried—

"Why didn't you kill him and be done with it?"

"What! Murder?" exclaimed the horrified hypocrite, and Zoronna, who was not particularly murderous—unless angered—accepted the rebuke.

She was petulant, often hard pressed, to get the money for the rapacious nurse. When she reproached de Gasparin, as though he were to blame for having got into a mess, he would take the wounded

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attitude of one who gets ingratitude for desperate service; and the upshot would be that she somehow scrambled together enough money to keep the nurse feeding the narcotic.

But the nurse was always threatening to confess, and absorbed larger and larger bribes. Once when de Gasparin had been a heavy loser at roulette, the nurse was suddenly taken ill and another had been installed. De Gasparin came flying to Zoronna, saying that except for his vigilance everything would have been lost—but now all she needed to do was to raise enough to bribe this new nurse. From then on Zoronna had two nurses to feed.

This sort of thing went on for weeks, but de Gasparin changed his name, took to a disguise, altered his habits, grew a little peremptory and careless in the manner of making his demands, so that Zoronna began to have suspicions—but still there was the terrible uncertainty and fearful dread. Her hatred for de Gasparin grew to a flame, as hatred usually does between people who share a common guilt. She sensed his hypocrisy and suspected his duplicity, but did not dare pitch him into the street—for she knew that something dreadful had happened to Niss and that she was implicated in it.

However, when she went to San Francisco, instead of remaining on the job and keeping the nurses soothed and muzzled, de Gasparin came after her, and grew more insolent in his gestures of the itching palm, while he made scant effort to conceal his wasteful expenditures and gambling; also he began more or less to sneer at her for having been so long taken in by the nurse-fake, but threatened viciously to tell all he knew if she tied up her purse strings.

Then de Gasparin met his death; my friend Robert Calversley went to prison for it; and I had come to Zoronna after the truth, and I got enough of it to confirm me in the belief that it would be no real injustice to make her sign a confession—for if Calversley did kill the fellow, it was she who inspired the murder.

## CHAPTER IV

*There are a few other virtues, but none more important than keeping faith with friendship.*

THE white candles burned steadily as painted flame. They stood motionless in the great mirror. We were motionless, too, and the silence of the room was such that it would scarcely have been easy to say which was shadow and which was life.

Zoronna had finished with telling me her story, even admitting that she had visited de Gasparin's room—and that she had heard the shot fired that killed him on her way down the back stairs. Calversley, she said, had been in de Gasparin's flat when she called there.

Yes, he had known the way de Gasparin was distressing and robbing her.

That evening when she talked with him, de Gasparin had told her not to be so excited as there was some one in the next room.

"Who?" she had demanded.

"Calversley."

She had gone to de Gasparin, she said, to tell him that she would not give up another dollar; she had told him that before she learned Calversley was there—then she left at once.

"Strange, is it not," I asked of her, "that with your best friend in the next room you should have hurried away?"

"There was nothing to do."

"You knew, didn't you, Miss Symondi, that he was there on your account, because de Gasparin had been bullying and bleeding you?"

"Yes, but——"

"But what?"

"He hadn't said anything to de Gasparin—he had just got there when I came."

"So de Gasparin did not know that you were friends?"

"No."

"How did he act when you told him there was to be no more money?"

"He threatened me terribly!"

"And Calversley, who was no doubt listening, heard all this?"

"If he listened, yes."

"And on your way down, when you heard the shot what did you think?"

"I thought: 'Oh, God! Bob has killed him!' "

"And there was never any doubt in your mind as to why?"

"I knew——"

Then apprehensively—

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that if Calversley killed de Gasparin, you knew it was because of you!"

She stared at me defiantly, then:

"Why do you say *'if'?* You know that he did."

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I tried a bluff.

"No," I said; "Calversley may have been truthful when he said that he heard the shot fired and rushing out, saw no one, but found the discharged revolver on the floor—and one half-drawn from de Gasparin's pocket. But, you see, he may have known who fired that revolver—and, of course, he would have gone to ten prisons before he would have mentioned your name."

"It is not so!" she protested.

"Yes. It makes no difference which of you shot de Gasparin, it is you who are guilty."

"Oh! You—you—*you!*"

"I am not a gentleman. I believe women, however beautiful, should go to prison as well as to hell when they deserve it. I have here a little typed statement that you will please sign, just as written."

With that I drew out a paper I had prepared, and pushed it across the broad black table, holding out my fountain pen.

"Never! Never! I will never do that!"

I spoke slowly:

"Are you sure de Gasparin lied to you? Are you sure that some of the money he got from you did not go to bribe the nurse? And are you so sure of your beauty that you would risk it against de Gasparin's diary before a jury? If you confess—" I indicated the paper—"you can win all the distinction and honor of a woman throwing herself away to free her lover, while if you stand trial for what was done to Niss—I know he is not your lover, but you need not tell the world that—and you will have all its sympathy."

She cried at me—

"Oh, I could kill you!"

Without looking around, I pointed behind me to where the body, unmoved, untouched, still lay, and said—

"Yes, I know."

I then put down the fountain pen by the paper, and looking at her, waited.

A forced confession may be of no legal value, but nevertheless it is a powerful instrument with which to torment any one who has a guilty conscience—and I believed just that of her. Besides, I was punishing her even if she could never be driven to admit the crime and take Calversley's place in prison.

She stared back at me, and we were motionless.

Zoronna was as stubborn as I was determined; and whatever fear she may have had of me was counterbalanced by the fear of what would be done with that half-sheet of typed paper when she had signed. And she was going to sign if I had to hold her hand in my fist while the pen trailed her name across the page. I never believed anything more strongly than I believed she was guilty of having actually shot de Gasparin.

Her jeweled right hand crept up stealthily to her breast and the fingers trembled. I knew that she wore a dagger, and that her thoughts were so strong the gesture of the creeping hand was unconscious.

The purplish eyes gazed hard at me. She said with an intensity that kept her voice low as a whisper:

"You don't know what madness this is for you! I warn you—I warn you. Nothing you have *ever* done is so dangerous!"

I said nothing. I waited. Silence. I felt she was weakening or she wouldn't have threatened.

From somewhere in the house I heard the soft jar of a door lightly closed. Zoronna lifted her head, listening, strained, doubtful; but when she glanced at me I saw she guessed who it was.

"I must go. I'll be right back," she said, low-voiced, as if to keep from being overheard, and rising.

I stopped her with snap of thumb and finger. Agitation overspread her, and a flush swept into her face. From the next room we heard a gentle:

"Ooh-who? Anybody home?"

A man's voice, soft and intimate; a young man's voice, boyish.

"I must go!"

She said it so low no one could have overheard, and started. She was distressed and eager, almost flustrated. I pointed at the paper on the black table.

"Sign!"

She hesitated. Footsteps were coming toward us.

"Sign!"

Whoever he was had reached the entrance; his hands pushed right and left at the curtains, and as I put a mask to my face with one hand and threw up a gun with the other, Zoronna's frantic whisper reached me—

"Don't shoot—I've signed!"

He was an extremely surprized young man. Any young man would have been.

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He understood the signal of the outthrust gun, and his hands, with fingers widespread, reached as if groping for the ceiling.

I adjusted the mask's elastic over the back of my head, and with just a little amusement noticed that Zoronna had also raised her hands—playing, too, as if she had been held up. From a corner of my eye I glanced down at the paper, and saw that it was signed. She had thought she was purchasing the life of this young man, whom I eyed with renewed interest. The other fellow had died so quickly when he came through the doorway that she, spurred by love-fears, thought to see him fall, too, if somehow I was not bargained with; and the wide black table between us kept her from bargaining with a dagger's point at my neck.

Something in her gestures, her eyes, her way of breathing, in her whispered tones and in her silence, made me know that she was greatly devoted to this fellow. So I looked him over carefully. He was young and had been very tenderly nurtured; his features were what are called refined—which means that they have never been pinched by hunger, scratched, bruised or toughened in the scramble for a livelihood. On his lip was a faint mustache. A rather fastidious person, I would say; neat, carefully dressed, with a pretty strong suggestion of daintiness. He had long thin delicate fingers. The eyes were blue, very blue.

I looked from him to Zoronna, watchfully; but anxiety for the boy in front of me held all her attention. I could see, at least I could feel, the protective urge pulsating in her tense body.

"And what is your name?" I demanded of him.

"Harrison Frederick," Zoronna answered quickly.

The boy's blue eyes shot at her, then at me, and back to her, and settled on the dead body almost at his feet.

"Mr. Frederick, you have arrived at a rather inopportune time. You let yourself in? You have a key, I take it?"

In a rather startled fashion he looked at me, then at Zoronna, back to me—his eyes fell again to the dead man. With an effort he raised them toward me, but at once they swayed to Zoronna as if for what answer to give me; and she answered for him a second time—

"Is that any of your affair, Mr. Robber?"

I leaned back against the table, and, putting my free hand behind me took the paper she had shoved across at the signing and folding it as well as I could without attracting Mr. Frederick's attention to what I was doing, eyed Zoronna from the corner of my mask's slits. Once upon a time in a situation not wholly unlike this, I had backed gracefully out of it by taking her jewels and the pocketbook of the man who had come in unexpectedly—and returned her jewels the next day. She evidently thought I would show some such consideration now; but there was to be nothing of that kind.

There was, now rigid on the tesselated floor, a body to be accounted for, disposed of, somehow put out of the way, and though by every right of self-defense I had done as I should, still Zoronna, as the chief witness, might tell a prejudiced story; or at least she might drive a bargain with me for the return of that signed confession.

It seemed best to put any such temptation clear beyond her thought. I said—

"Mr. Frederick, you are an extremely unlucky young man."

His blue eyes flashed up at me. He was uneasy, even frightened; but no coward. He glanced at Zoronna, and I followed his gaze. She was looking at me, intently, wondering, dangerously.

To him I said:

"Somebody will no doubt be accused of killing the unlucky—even more unlucky than you, Mr. Frederick—fellow there. That he broke through those curtains with gun drawn would ordinarily be sufficient to get a 'Not Guilty' from any jury; but, regrettably, I haven't the time to let a jury interfere with my affairs."

Zoronna was angrily tense. Every line of her body and gleam of her eyes threatened to make a hodge-podge of my hopes; but if I had ever let anybody's threats, implied or stated, trouble me, long before that I would have been housed in a padded cell.

I went on, slowly, for, though I seemed to be addressing the young man, it was to Zoronna that I was talking and I wished her to get the significance of each word:

"If it seems necessary—necessary you understand—I shall perhaps be able to establish a very good alibi. In exchange for some service I might give, it is not unlikely that I could get some members of even the

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Niss family, perhaps even the Niss lawyers, to swear that I was with them from dinner until midnight!"

The sharp intake of breath between her closed teeth let me know that Zoronna had increased her wish for a tombstone at my head; but of course the boy stared blankly, troubled, muddled.

"And now following the example once set by a person I know, by which evidence of murder was fastened on an innocent man —one innocent as yourself, Mr. Frederick; for, in fact, the murderer afterwards signed a confession——"

Zoronna made a vague, inarticulate, half-muffled but furious sound. Yet she did not move. She knew that I was watching her.

"—I am going to leave my gun here in the room."

With that I stooped a little and dropped it to the floor, standing erect at once and with a second automatic drawn from my pocket. I knew that they could dispose of the gun if given a little time—but if they raised a hue and cry immediately, with the gun at hand, their story might be suspected. My stall was to disconcert them and gain a minute or two; I needed nothing more.

"If you—" turning toward her—"and you, wish to try explaining that discharged gun to the police you summon, all right. But don't forget how improbable it will be to try to fasten the guilt on me—with my excellent alibis. And when I go out of the front door, if you think you can raise the neighbors and neighborhood in time to catch me, or have anybody catch an identifying glimpse of me, why, go ahead. Try it! I have an unusual faculty for disappearing."

They believed me, for when I speak I am convincing; and Zoronna, who knew me well, did not dare doubt but that something just about as I had said would happen.

And when I was done, there was again silence; and the fleshy candles burned their motionless flames over the scene of death and treachery, passionate love, youth dazzled by wonder-tinted fear, and mockery, all of which was caught with life-sized magnitude in the great mirror that bore the immemorial warning of—

*Vanitas, Omnia Vanitas.*

## CHAPTER V

*Bold men make their own opportunities.*

THE next day some of the New York papers, into which I glanced with some curiosity, carried from an inch to three or four inches of news sent out of San Francisco telling that a convict, Robert Calversley, had escaped from his guard on the train while being transferred from San Quentin to Folsom prison.

He had not been thought a particularly dangerous prisoner, but nevertheless had worn an Oregon boot and was handcuffed to the guard. Theoretically, escape was impossible. But having the guard take him to the lavatory, Calversley had drawn a gun, somehow secreted on his body, and forced the guard to unlock the handcuff which had then been fastened upon himself and around a steam pipe.

After that Calversley unlocked the boot, gagged the guard, made his way to the vestibule and raising the platform and opening the door, plunged from the moving train. His capture was expected any hour. At least that was the story told by wire.

So there was now nothing that I could do to help him; and until he was caught, or came to light somehow, anything I might try to do would be valueless.

There was nothing in the papers about Zoronna, or about a man's murdered body being found, or any hint of trouble or mystery that could be associated with my part in the affair of the evening before.

However, taking the pains to inquire, I did learn that day that Zoronna had precipitately sold everything in her apartment and vanished. This was just about what I had expected. I had her signed confession; it would be for the police to hunt her down.

## CHAPTER VI

*The so-called blessings of poverty, with which humanity is cursed, are of no value except to the rich, who are rarely privileged to enjoy them.*

THE Leonardo had the florid entrance of an apartment house ambitious to be mistaken for an Italian palace. Big fluted columns stood on each side, with the fine utilitarian value of warning away flat seekers who wanted something reasonable. The steps were wide and of white stone that a lean old woman crawled over on hands and



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knees, with bucket and brush at dawn. Inside the Leonardo that note of costliness which had been sounded at the entrance was taken up and repeated in the spacious ceiling, the wide stairway, the floral fountain, the rugs and statues of fat cherubs, tapestries and big paintings after the manner of Old Masters.

Millionaires lived at the Leonardo. I don't see how anybody else could have paid the rent; or even why they, who are notoriously unhappy in their tastes, would have cared to pay it. It was supposed to be one of the magnificent structures on the Drive. Very exclusive. Exclusive means to exclude, shut out, keep way, chase off fellows who have bank accounts no bigger than mine. But rich men enjoy the flash of extravagance; and the human animal never begrudges the money he spends on what he enjoys. Millions for the high spots, but not one cent for alimony, expresses the inclination if not the conclusion of rich men's affairs.

The rich have so many troubles that I wonder at the eagerness of everybody to share them. Perhaps because the lack of money is the greater evil. Human nature would rather suffer from an overloaded than an empty stomach. And gold is magic. The dollar sign has cabalistic power. In this age that romanticists call miserably commercial, sheer money-wizardy has shrunk the earth until the man who controls wealth, as Aladdin controlled his lamp, has the jewels, fruits, fabrics, the harem's beauty, of all the world within his fingers' grasp; and if he is wretched he is deserving of no more sympathy than a glutton with belly pains.

I went to the Leonardo with the reluctance that one always has for a visit, a social visit, that is likely to be a little wearisome; but Delano was putting on some sort of hocus-pocus show for me, and insisted that I see it.

There are many people in various parts of the world who know what the name of Henri Delano means without anything more being said. He turned his face away from publicity, partly because he was modest, and largely because it would have hurt his business.

People call me a gambler; they called the princely Canfield a gambler; and they call any little dyspeptic tin-horn that totes loaded dice a gambler; and so with Henri Delano—they called him a gambler. He wasn't really much more of a gambler than the Prince of Monaco. Delano never bucked one of his own roulette wheels. Neither did I, though they were just as honest as the wheels of Monte Carlo; and a fellow was just as sure of losing on them.

In his youth Delano, it was said, had been on the staff of the famous Monsieur Blanc who glitteringly plundered the rich and fashionable in the days of Napoleon III.

Some sort of tragedy had made him leave Europe—so it was said. Many things were said of him, for he was a unique character, very rich, a little mysterious at times, and he was credited with numerous gallantries. Sometimes rumor is full of truth; but, as in a badly made mirror, the image is twisted out of shape.

I never knew Delano until he was an unhappy old man, and in the midst of his unhappiness people looked at him and spoke enviously of what a jolly old sinner he was, how untouched by an age that had piled nearly seventy years on to him. He was a man of genius, particularly for business. A man with business genius is not the slave-driving plugger, giving orders in a bullying stagey tone, chewing big unlighted black cigars that people like to think of as the typical Big Boss. He is a judge of character; and if there is any worrying to be done, he picks men to do it for him.

Delano, quiet, reposed, unruffled, shrewd, with an air of kindly cynicism, said:

"Your American thinks he is a great swimmer if he makes a big splash. The big splash—it means success in American language. Like the big fish in the small puddle, he wants you to hear his tail go *flop-flop*."

Delano had gambling clubs in several cities between New York and San Francisco. He spent fortunes in decorating, outfitting, gilding his salons; and all the extravagances of furnishings was merely lighting candles to draw moths.

Delano had a fellow living with him whom I wouldn't have let live with me for two minutes. One look at his face and I would have sent him out to find grave diggers to bury him.

This Zitka, who was some kind of a foreign creature that spoke an outlandish gibberish, seemed to have been transformed, perhaps by his own magic, in Delano's shadow. He lived with Delano, but whether

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as a servant or companion I don't know. Perhaps as a little of both. Delano was slightly below medium height, not fat at all, but his body was shaped by well-fed curves; his hair was dark, thick, but rather closely trimmed, and he wore a carefully pointed beard that showed but little gray. Undoubtedly both hair and beard were artfully dyed. And this Zitka—shadows never resemble the objects from which they are cast—was short, thick-bodied, but with a sort of fleshless face and eyes blacker than ink in sockets deep as holes.

He was a fortune-teller, this Zitka.

## CHAPTER VII

*Repentance is a device by which the guilty hope to escape the consequence of their pleasures.*

"MY FRIEND," Delano told me, "you are wrong to distrust Zitka. He has always liked you. Spoke well of you."

"I have no wish to be praised by a devil-worshiper."

"What a name for Zitka! Every morning in that ancient tongue that you call 'gibberish,' which was my mother's, he repeats the old, old magic words of his race that keep a man from harm. Would you hear them?"

"There are times when I greatly wish that I knew some such words."

Delano smiled with unruffled tolerance, and answered gently—

"Unfortunately a man has to keep with them and have faith in them, or they are of no value."

"There usually is a catch of some kind."

"No," said Delano, "these words will really keep a man from harm if he believes in them. They have become a charm-sentence which for more centuries than anybody can guess—the 'gibberish' is what philologists are amazed to find almost identical with Sanskrit—has kept every man from harm if he has been faithful to the injunction. Would you hear it?"

I had almost said, "Nonsense"; but by his manner I knew that he was already half-amused by expecting me to do something of the kind. So I turned an ear and waited.

"Your language, all these new languages, are softer than ours—the gibberish of my childhood—so the words have a different sound; but as nearly as I can convey them, the magic sounds are these: 'Keep parched grain in your hand that the poor may have food, a sword in your mouth that foes may have fear, fire in your breast that friends may have warmth, and if a woman weeps know that God is angered!'"

Delano gazed retrospectively into the gloom beyond the soft glow of the bronze lamp at his elbow. A hand, heavy with a signet ring, lay on the carved arm of the chair, the fingers softly tapping the serpent's head a workman in wood had fashioned.

"My friend," he spoke quietly, "you may quote wisdom to a babe in its cradle, to the boy, to the youth—on up to the man, old as I. But each of us has to learn, each in his own way. It isn't what you tell a man that helps him; it is what he already knows when you begin to talk. That is why ten thousand years of Sanskrit wisdom, twenty-five centuries of Confucianism, two thousand years of Buddhism and Christianity, find us still robbing the poor, swarming with falsehoods, faithless to friends, cruel to women, just as selfish and eager over feeding our appetites as when the first wise man made himself an alphabet. We have changed our clothes and improved our cooks, but devitalized our food.

"I am up near the allotted age of man, and the fault I have found with life from youth to this very hour is that knowledge comes too late to be of the finest value. The burnt child fears the fire—but what good does that do the poor little child after it has been incinerated? Children have been getting their pink little fingers blistered ever since the apes that became men first huddled about a watch-fire; but the ones that are born tomorrow, in spite of all the warnings their mothers can give, must risk being burned alive to learn that the pretty, bright, dancing, jewel-vivid flame is dangerous.

"And poor, savage Zitka—every morning he says, 'If a woman weeps, know that God is angered', with never a thought that it can possibly refer to the Jewel of Death he put on the soft warm white breast of the girl he loved. They buried her without taking the dagger out of her heart—those fierce mountaineers who still speak Sanskrit. A true daughter of her people—she did not weep. She smiled at him while she died. But I—ah, I——"

He stopped and did not go on, but there was pain, regret, the intensity of sorrow on his face. That was the first inkling I ever had that tragedy brooded behind the mask of suave kindliness, of amiable cynicism,

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that he wore for the world to see. In time I came to know that he was the most distressed and repentant man alive.

Ever since he had needed a manager for his Huron Club in San Francisco he had been almost persistently friendly toward me; and though—partly because of the certain people of authority who hadn't quite forgotten an old affair—I had used precautions that were the next thing to secrecy in stopping at Mrs. Dupper's rooming-house, still because I wanted a rather unusual courtesy at the Ojibway, I had looked up Delano, and he was almost embarrassingly glad to see me.

He never grew tired of remembering how he had tried to get me as the Huron's manager. I was well known in the gambling life there, and he had said to me—

"Make your own terms."

I had no terms to make.

"But I will pay whatever you say," he told me.

I declined.

"A salary—any you say. And a percentage."

I told him that I had never done things I did not want to do—not even for money.

"But why, my friend. Why? Be frank and say why."

I was. I told him that the roulette wheel was as much of a sure-thing swindle as three-card monte; and that while an honest poker player, like myself, could let or even make a deserving man win, could at will trim cheats and tin-horns, that the honest roulette wheel was avariciously indifferent to the needs and worthiness of players. I told him that what I got out of the gambler's life was not more money than I needed but the pleasure of frequently doing to other men what I thought they needed to have done to them. Moreover, that as a house manager I would have to wear a cordial grin with a dress suit, be gracious to people simply because they had money to throw away, encourage fools already neck-deep in losses, and give up my days and nights to the making of an income for which I had no need and no wish.

I said that by the time the first forty hours were passed I would have had electricians in and every wheel in the house wired; that I did not like low-bred spenders and wolfish crooks well enough to give them an even break, ever; and that if I had let mere luck run my life for me, I would have been poked into a coffin before I was half-grown.

"No, no, my friend," said Delano, amused, putting a hand toward my shoulder, "you really won't do as a manager. You have some good ideas, some very good ideas—but like most good ideas it would not be wise to put them into practise."

## CHAPTER VIII

*An honest fortune-teller is one that would cut his throat to fulfill the prophecy of his death.*

THIS is how it came about that when I went to spend an evening with him, Delano suddenly bared his breast and gave me his heart to read.

He had thought that I might be interested in some of Zitka's flubdubbery—my name for it; not Delano's—and Zitka, with the tolerance that one who is conscious of intimacy with supernatural powers may well have for a benighted skeptic, was willing that I attend the rites—or whatever they were. I expected to be bored.

Anyway, Delano, in his quiet manner, invitational but really urging, assured me that I would be entertained, and Zitka told him he might say to me that I would be amazed.

"And it will please him," said Delano, "if you try to look on it as a favor."

I was not interested in pleasing that fellow. I was just a little suspicious of him. I did not like the face he had nor those black spots he used for eyes. There was nothing about him that I feared, or that made me uneasy. There is nothing about any man that makes me uneasy. I was merely suspicious. In fact, I am more or less suspicious of anybody who does something that he wants me to regard as a favor.

Delano lived simply, in rooms that cost a fortune a year. Only the very rich can live simply in New York, keep to themselves, have privacy. Others are dinted by elbows as they walk the streets, pressed out of shape in subways, they must scramble for place in bread lines at lunch counters, and live in honeycombed buildings where thin walls let in all of the neighbors' clatter and chatter.

Midnight was the hour set for Zitka's voodoo performance. It seems that in the silence of night hours devils are much more responsive; or it may merely be that quiet midnight is when people are the most susceptible to ghost fancies. Delano and I had

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talked of nothing important for some hours, then midnight came. Zitka opened the door of his room, bowing low while the vibrant *whi-n-n-ng* of a metallic bar, as if struck with padded hammer, shivered through the gloomy quiet.

Delano arose and smiled at me, letting me feel that we should not be too critical, nor expect too much; but that our attention would please Zitka.

As we were leaving the room, I asked Delano how he felt about it—this witchcraft jugglery?

"How do I really feel about it?" he repeated, and, with a shrug of shoulder and misty half-smile sifting through his beard, answered: "It is in my blood—my blood more than in my head. Besides, all religions avow that there are devils; and I am no infidel!"

Zitka's broad thighs were bound with a wide scarlet belt; his thick chest—the mountaineer's chest—was covered with something like a fine chamois blouse, studded with brilliant embroidery. He held himself rigid as an executioner while the doomed file past, as we entered. That queer head of his was bound about with black cloth, and on it, above the forehead, was a figure something like a broken swastika that seemed as if drawn with flame. Without moving or changing shape, the cryptic figuration burned. His face looked like a death's head, with sun-blackened hide drawn over it and blots for eyes. Delano had told me—

"Among our people it is said the seed must be what the plant bears; the sons of shoemakers must be cobblers, the sons of wizards must be wizards."

Zitka closed the door behind us, and we stood in the blackest darkness I have ever seen or felt, or however it is that darkness is recognized. And silence, complete and seemingly impenetrable. I supposed it was to aid me in feeling creepy. But the son of the ten thousand wizards did not wait long enough for that. He had been badly misinformed by his spooks as to how much suspense it took to make me feel creepy.

He spoke. His voice was hoarse as a bear's. His people must have been taught their words, or their articulation, by the cracking and creaking of wind-broken trees, the clatter of rocks down mountain sides, the scream of eagles. Anyway, where nature is mild and flowers glow, the speech is not harsh. His words seemed some sort of invocation, and, as if answered, a circle of fire ran like a powder flash through the air—or so it appeared until I discovered that the bright circle was on the top of a stone table at which we presently sat.

The flame burned rapidly down to an iridescent glow, and the glow remained. It gave no light, but lay like a thread of fire. Above it, across from me, also as if drawn on air, was the figuration of Zitka's headcloth; and the figure was motionless.

He spoke again. The voice seemed to come from below the out-of-shape swastika. His words were like the explosive snarl of a tiger cat under the whip. At once, across the room, sounding far away, there was the *whi-n-n-ng* of the metallic bar, suspended from a wire, like a big tuning-fork gently struck. That was perhaps to give the devils their cue, put them on their toes. If I had been a devil I wouldn't have wanted Zitka for a master. And as I was not yet in a state of mind to believe that he could be in two places at once, or that devils would strike big tuning-forks any more than I have ever believed that ghosts rap tables and unmusically thump banjos, I suspected that he had pressed a wire with his toe and caused something to hit the bar.

Then we had light, a dim light from candles and by it we sat at the table while Zitka, mumbling and muttering, went about his incantation.

From some kind of a stone vial he poured three or four drops of blood supposed to be from a virgin, and examined its dissolution in a bowl of water. The result was evidently displeasing. He leaned forward and examined the bowl of water as though he had lost something in a bowl just about like that one, and wanted to make sure. He grew into an ugly mood, and seemed to be cursing. Delano came in with a remark, and I was surprized at the intense look on his face—it was more than interest, curiosity, amusement; it was belief!

Zitka then passed his hand over the bowl, and flame leaped up off the water. This was almost like black fire. Delano was startled, almost frightened.

"Boh!" said Zitka, and with a sweep of his powerful hand he swept bowl, water, sable flame and all from the table. The bowl smashed on the floor.

"Great bad luck," said Delano to me, wiping his forehead with a kerchief, and pretending as if he did not believe it.

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"Always is," I told him, "to believe in this sort of thing."

He eyed me uncertainly for a moment, smiled unconvincingly and looked away.

Inside of the fiery circle that lay on the table, Zitka made queer cabalistic markings with white chalk, pausing now and then to strike his forehead and with the harshness of a crow's voice mutteringly tell his slaves of darkness what he wanted them to do. It is just possible that he may have been praying, as I have seen lank excited clerical men shut their eyes, shake their fists heavenward, and tell the Lord what to do.

Delano, who knew what it was about, leaned forward as absorbedly tense as some fellow with everything staked looking into the bowl of a roulette wheel. And such is life, always. Delano, with careless certainty let wheels spin night after night all through the country; but still, less superstitious than most gamblers at that, he bent forward with eager concern to see what a piece of chalk dotting and dashing about the foot of a crimson candle would write.

When the cabalism seemed complete, Zitka held up an ivory tube about the size of a small pencil, which he touched to his forehead, mumbling a moment before he unscrewed the top. I thought he was withdrawing something imaginary from the small tube, but presently I caught a glint and leaning closer saw that it was a hair, three or four inches in length.

Zitka held it to the candle's flame tip, and as fire touched it, he let go. The flame struck the hair with an inaudible puff and an infinitesimal trace of ash fell about the chalk marks. Zitka, bending till his nose almost touched the table, snarled a crackling word. Delano groaned like a man who has lost.

Zitka drew forth another hair and touched it to the flame. The result was the same, only Zitka's curses seemed more savage.

A third time a hair was drawn from the ivory cylinder, and again whatever the devil did with the wisp of ash was maddening to the wizard. With a flurry of curses he struck the candle, knocking it from the table and wiping his chalk marks into confusion with the same blow. His displeasure was imperious; and the words, like curses, that poured out must have made the invisible devils cower and slink.

Delano sat back, taking a deep breath as he drew a broad silken handkerchief from his pocket and patted his forehead. He looked toward me and smiled a little, a little embarrassed as if he knew that it must appear ridiculous that he would have been absorbed in mummery of the kind.

"It is very strange," he said, sobering as he began to speak. "Very. We were not expecting anything of the kind."

Zitka hissed in barbarously broken English—

"Er-room-un!"

I can't say how I knew by that he meant a woman—probably by the indignant contempt.

"And she will be—ah—it seems that she will warn us of dangers," said Delano, still pretending not to be entirely convinced.

Zitka, motionless as stone, watched me. And when I find a man looking with any such intensity as that at me, I put my eyes on his face and keep them there. Somehow, behind that skull-like face I suspected a spider's brain.

"Strange! Strange!" Delano muttered thoughtfully, to himself. Then we were all silent and motionless, and the stillness was enough to have made the movement of spirits audible. With a frozen stare in his eyes of solid black, Zitka waited—as if waiting for something.

It came. A gentle respectful knocking on the hall door.

At first I thought it was one of Zitka's devils, giving a little manifestation of obedience to his master; but Zitka started, as if touched with surprize. Delano looked up, puzzled. The rapping, very respectful, came again.

"SOMEBODY is there," said Delano, mystified, turning to me.

That seemed the only reasonable deduction, since Zitka apparently did not recognize it as one of his dark servants from the farther edge of the grave. He glanced inquiringly at Delano.

Again the knocking, quietly, as if this was the last request for attention.

Delano asked if I would mind seeing who it was. Servants had been sent away; and if Zitka had gone to the door in that rig of his, whoever it was might not have paused to tell whatever it was the knocking was for. Coming unexpectedly on anybody, he would have scared them into flight with his skeleton face, and trappings like a Death rigged out for a carnival.

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At the door I found a polite and intelligent sort of young man, who explained that he was on the house staff—meaning, I took it, a detective—and he wouldn't have troubled us at all but that he had seen a light under the door; and well—he smiled and raised an envelop toward me.

It was addressed to Mr. Henri Delano. It had been left a few minutes before by a messenger who insisted that it was of extreme importance and should be delivered at once. The messenger declared that he had been told to say that it was a matter of life and death.

The polite and intelligent young man appeared relieved that he had not unduly disturbed anybody. He said one could never tell how important a thing of that kind might be; but if there had been no light under the door he would have risked waiting until morning. He bowed with the air of a man who has been rewarded and went away.

The envelop of heavy linen texture was addressed to:

Henri Delano, Esq., The Leonardo,
Greatly Important

"What can this be?" he said as he took it; but without haste, or anything but the most moderate of interest, reached for his glasses and after that quietly removed a small inlaid paper-cutter from a case that he took from his pocket. With nothing but an appearance of slight curiosity he slit the envelop.

He moved over under the lamp, took out the paper and read. What he read hit him and hit him hard. He was visibly shaken. His hands shook so that the paper vibrated like a leaf in the wind.

I watched Zitka. He stood feet apart, thumbs in the wide scarlet belt, head up and eyes on the letter, as if reading at a distance. He could not have read so far away, even if he knew English, which I doubted. And it would appear so because Delano instead of giving him the letter began to translate into the barbarous tongue.

Zitka smashed fist to palm with a startling smack and turned toward me, looking with a sort of challenge, as much as to say—

"Now what do you think of our art?"

Delano came to me; one hand he pressed against his cheek, and with the other he offered the letter, and said—

"I wish you would read this—it is—it distresses me, *terribly!*"

As I took it he turned away, dropping his face into his hands for a moment like a man breaking down.

The letter, or rather note, had evidently been written in haste and with agitation:

MR. DELANO: Your young friend Claude Genlis is in very, very great danger. I have tried to warn him, but he will not listen to me. The woman he loves is not the woman for him. She is a bad terrible woman, but that is not the greatest danger, for there is a horrible man who is determined to do the boy some dreadful harm; and Claude *must* be made to leave the country. Please, please do all you can. I dare tell no more, for if it is known that a warning came, it would also be known that it could have come from no one but myself; and I dare not sign myself more than—X.

When I had finished and looked up, Delano was across the room in a chair with his head propped heavily against his hand.

I tapped the letter and inquired quietly, a little curious but not much—

"Who is this Claude Genlis?"

At that Delano straightened up, but his eyes struck at Zitka, who had on the instant turned toward him; and in the fraction of a second that their eyes met they must have held counsel together, for then Delano leaned forward and put his hands to his face as he answered clearly but low—

"More than my son—he is my life!"

There was no particular reason why that should have been a surprize, almost a jarring surprize, to me. It was no affair of mine. I had no concern in Delano's life. But I had never thought of him as—well as the sort of man who would have a close personal attachment for anybody. He was a ripened man of the world, with all of his appetites moderated, his passions soothed, wealthy beyond the needs of a prince and seeking only personal comforts and quiet friendships. But my ears are not clogged. I know the note of tragedy when it is sounded; and it doesn't have to be the choking, sobbing, throat-squeezed, strangulated anguish of a man who has learned sorrow in an actor's boarding-house.

So with the letter in my hand I stood and looked at him and said nothing. It is a pitiful thing to be rich and unhappy, but there is at least the compensating sense of drama that the rich man always feels for himself in the midst of his misery—something that rarely compensates the lowly for their agony.

Life is cruel, though, to high and low; it is cruel, bitterly cruel; and its punishments

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are the punishments of the knotted lash about the naked bowed shoulders of the babes and youths, maids, men and women, that are thrust willy-nilly into it; and it is cruelest of all to poor people, to the poverty-ridden, to scrofulous children, and those with rickety bones, to boys and girls and fathers and mothers who have to stand reaching on tip-toes to keep their fingers on a pay-envelop.

It has always seemed to me a little like Justice when Life strikes a rich man. I won't say that he deserves it, for there is to be a Judgment Dawn to settle all that; but the rich man, however gentle his nature, always expects a certain deference, they are of a caste apart; and at most and worst they never endure the hungers, the pain and humiliations of their unclothed and hapless fellows, who are just as human and suffer just as vibrantly as other people.

There is I know, something ironically tragic about a rich man, or, more often, his son, going to the devil because he has been denied nothing; but the devil never claims any but his own—which makes the world more or less take it for granted that the slum-born are his, just as the off-spring of slaves belong to the master.

There was nothing for me to say, so I waited. Presently Delano got up and excused himself for a moment. He wanted, I could see, to get by himself, to regain his composure. He went out.

He was no sooner through the door than Zitka raised a hand above his black-clothed death's-head and gave a smart snap of finger and thumb. His black eyes blazed, and his wide lipless mouth was grinning from ear to ear. With the other hand he pointed to the letter, and in wretchedly broken English he asked triumphantly what I now thought.

"You timed it well," I told him.

He acted puzzled, and he was surprized. He took a step backward with a gesture of indignation. What did I mean?

"The messenger came when you told him to come, brought what you told him to bring, said what you told him to say—just as the woman probably wrote what you told her to write!"

Laboriously, with very much the air of threatening, he said—

"I swear it is not so!"

I told him that I did not care what he swore.

"You think that of me!"

For an answer I told him that certainly I did not think there had been any intelligent prescience in the singeing of hairs and the spluttering of curses at unseen shadows because a bit of ash fell on one spot of chalk markings instead of on another.

Instead of being angered by what I had made sharply insulting, he gazed at me for an instant, and threw back his head and laughed without amusement and without sound; then strange words broke and cracked between his lips. From his eyes I could tell that he was either speaking to me or about me; and if I am to be cursed I want it done in a language I can understand. I demanded what he meant. With the air of one looking through wood and stone, on into the future, he said—

"Who wears the yoke must go as the goad points."

I lifted a finger to the back of my neck—

"Meaning there—on me?"

With his great thick arms folded across his wide breast, he bowed humbly, or with mock humbleness. Anyway, he bowed.

"And what am I to do?"

He thrust out a hand toward the paper:

"You shall protect our boy. It is written by Fate!"

That was too plainly a bit of fortune-teller's frame-up; and before I could tell him that I would see him hung up by his heels, head down in boiling oil, before I would raise a finger to fulfil any of his prophecy, he was gone from the room.

## CHAPTER IX

*The wicked may not be happy, but they at least have the pleasure of making good people miserable; and this in itself is often a strong temptation to evilness.*

IT WAS not through a sudden convulsive impulse that Delano gave me a long look into his life. He had no friends, he dared have no friends—nothing but a few social companions. There was no one with whom he could talk frankly unless he went to a detective agency and bought a pair of ears, and then he would be talking to strangers.

When he came back into the room, before he spoke I could see that his mask was off; and as he sat down, each hand gripping a serpent's head, Old Age himself seemed looking sorrowfully out of the gray eyes. His body was shaken. The palsy of emotion was on him.

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There is that about a confessional which is alarmingly like falling over a cliff. Perhaps only priests and police know how true this is. Once the slip is made, everything tumbles. Shame, coolness, caution, all reticence, are thrown away with an almost drunken disregard. The thieving girl breaks down and tells it all. The diplomat seeks just the same sort of relief out of writing bold memoirs, though perhaps it is only out of his coffin that he gives permission to have them read.

The pent-up secrecy in Delano gave way. He was not merely a rich old epicure, graciously poised, amused, contented, a little cynical for the sake of wit, enjoying a certain daintiness out of life, chiefly concerned with social pleasantries, of fastidious but imperturbable temper—not at all.

His fiber was rooted in the clay out of which all of us are made. He wore his mask with the consummate ease of long effort, spoke his part and played his rôle with the greater skill of the master actor, hypocrite, philosopher—as you please.

Some men, many men, with poise and pose fool their fellows, as he had done. Big men, rich men, great men, statesmen, warriors, artists, the saintly and the satanic, no matter what their age or fame, down at the bottoms of their hearts are just like other men, but none of them are greatly unlike children; and somebody, a wife, a valet, priest, friend, mistress, daughter or newspaper reporter, knows it of each of them, however much they may strut and scowl before the world.

The ferocious Zitka, who meddled with blood drops and flame and water to foretell what the devil would do next, had long been the only one who knew what Delano kept hid down within himself until he threw away his mask and manner before me.

Most people pray, not to beg something of God, but to share an inner feeling they would be ashamed to show the world. Delano could not pray, but with half-philosophical apology he talked to me; and, beginning vaguely, he became frank; and, since confession is a kind of intoxicant, went headlong into the story.

"—the thing I most fear," he said tremblingly, holding the letter open on his knee but watching the shadows outside of the lamp's aura, "is not the women. It is the warning. A warning of something for many years I have dreaded a great deal more than any woman. Poor, poor boy! He may not even claim me as a friend—for thirty years I have not dared have a friend! It has been terrible—terrible. All these years it has been terrible. I—ah, I—a woman killed herself because she hated me, and with her last breath taught the son she had borne to curse me!"

Delano's expression, as he leaned forward, half-clutched hand out to me, was greatly like that I have often seen on the faces of men who watch their last dollar balanced on the turn of a card; then he sank back, wearily, as though he had lost. His eyes looked abstractedly away into the shadows, beyond the fringe of light that the lamp spread around us. Presently he said, his voice even and quiet, unnaturally so:

"At my age, it is a terrible thing to feel that death will be violent. Ah, we old men are again like children, and want to be caressed to sleep—into the last long sleep."

"Your fortune-telling savage has told you that?" I asked with a sharp edge on the contempt I felt for such prophets. Soberly he answered:

"It is something I feel, something I have felt for years. No, Zitka has not told me that. He loves me too much to tell me that, even if it were—were—written. But I feel it. You know how at times one feels the inevitable approaching through the black mist—that black mist that is the future. For thirty—no, but for over twenty years I have had no friend but Zitka. I have dared have no other friend, because—because—because it meant death to any man or woman or child that I loved!"

I sat without moving, without answering, and watched him. I know something of the kinks and twists that men have under their heads; and most of all this is nonsense, or worse, as superstition is worse; but Delano was an intelligent man, outwardly untroubled, pleasant, gracious—and whether he was touched with secret lunacy, or was really a royal-hearted gambler who smilingly played a losing game before the world, I could not tell.

"All my life," he said calmly, not bitterly, "I seem to have been punished because I could not be cruel. There was a time when I could have stamped out that little monster—to death. But I said to myself, 'Let it live. I will be good to it, too'; for—" he shuddered as if an icy draft had swept in upon him—"after all it was—was my—my son!"

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Pause, and his thoughts were flying backward through the years. Then:

"You cannot know what terrible women they are there in our mountains, high up, walled in on all sides. Not even the blood waves of the Great War washed over them. But none of the mighty wars that history has remembered—or forgotten—touched the people of those mountains. They have been there since the Aryans moved out of Asia, high up, remote, unknown, unconquerable by Romans, Tartars, Turks or Germans!

"And I tell you the truth when I say I do not know why I went back into those black mountains and married her—the woman who grew to hate me. My father was of another people, an explorer, half-poet too, who pushed his way up and on toward wherever there was mystery and purple-veiled distance. I am not like that. I like peace and restfulness.

"He took my mother, the gentlest of all the women there, away with him, and loved her tenderly as she loved him. He died when I was a child, and she turned her eyes toward the black mountains, and took me back with her. As I grew up I knew I did not belong among those thick-muscled men, with chests like the bellows of a great organ. When she died, I went down out of the mountains and to France; but something made me remember the boy-promise to that girl who was straight like a pine tree, with eyes the same as a hawk's. Zitka—he knew and hated her and her family—said it was with witch-charms she called me. That is not true, of course; but it is strange.

She wanted to be out where the world was wide enough for her strong wings; and I brought her down into the cities she had dreamed about. Men looked at her, my friends and strangers—they looked at her admiringly and half-afraid. More than half-afraid—really afraid. She was like some dark goddess, some Amazonian queen, bold and dangerous and proud. There was everything in her but the softness that is feminine.

"She, Deldohara, was mountain bred. Of a wizard family, too. Her family was a rival of Zitka's. He said dire things would befall the marriage. Evil prophecy never fails. Zitka is of my mother's family. And Deldohara! How she soon hated the life she had been eager to rush into; and the white, timid, dainty women all about her, with their filmy charm that she could not understand—their charm which was so much more mighty than her charms and incantations. She was a terrible woman, magnificent of body, and jealous.

"She could not understand what it was other women had that she lacked—the pale little fragile women, fluttering, blushing, wrapping themselves about with silks and chiffon, with their weak tinkling voices!

"No man, however bold, would whisper word-froth to her, pinch her hand under the table. The blow of her arm could have broken his skull! Would have, too, most likely. She was unhappy, savagely so. Yet I have wondered if it was not the word-froth that she wanted, the furtive pressure of a forbidden hand. Perhaps not actually that, but at least humble admiration in men's eyes; and all she saw there was wonder, not unlike curiosity. It maddened her. Ah, that was many, many years ago!"

Delano paused, reflectively. He was not hesitating; but for a few moments he dropped his head to one side and looked down as if into a crystal through which the past was flowing; then the story went on.

This Deldohara, whose body was like that of a savage queen fitted to lead her barbarians into battle, was not only unhappy but furiously jealous, inwardly rageful that the pink dove-like women all about should be admired, served, loved, should be whimsically imperious yet adored. At last, not without the justification that jealousy feels entitles it to the ultimate fury—for Delano was pleasure-loving and sought the warm soft caress of the pink dove-like women—the terrible Deldohara endangered his life.

He went away from her. Perhaps he should have said "fled." But because he was generous, or from less worthy motives, such as the vain hope of touching her forgiveness—there is no doubt that he was fearful of her—he made arrangements that gave her money, plenty of money.

But this fierce woman, baffled by the life and ways of Europeans, like an eagle with wings and talons cut, became mad with but one terrible crazed passion in her heart. Delano's words, spoken tremblingly, a hand toward me as if asking for something, were:

"She cursed the unborn child in her womb and prayed by all the evil arts she knew that she might give birth to a devil who would

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harry from the face of the earth whomever and whatever I loved. And that prayer was answered!"

I could go on and on, elaborating Delano's story into a biography; but there is no need for more of it than will set the stage, fill in the background, give an understanding of the dark passion that began its menace two score years before.

The world does not know, except now and then by some lurid outcropping, and then does not comprehend, the fierce evilness that runs through the human heart; and just as little is known, and even less is comprehended, of the generosity, kindness, warm sympathy, unselfish devotion that runs through the same heart.

Deldohara had gone back to her own people, and turned over to her family the little monstrosity. When he was old enough to understand fully, the more vividly to stamp the vow of vengeance on his mind, she had killed herself in his presence, making him swear as she died that he would search out and torment and destroy every man, woman and child upon whom Delano set his affection.

At least that was the story as it came to Delano; but I could not help the feeling that Zitka's dramatic sense had made such distortions as he felt were fitting. Nevertheless, according to Delano, the curse struck unerringly. *Something* began to happen to persons whom he liked especially well—accidents, they might appear in the eyes of the world, but to him they seemed the dark revenge of Deldohara. One man was crushed in the fall of a burning building; another was thrown from a runaway horse and picked up with a broken neck; the child of a friend—Delano loved children—that he particularly petted, died horribly of lockjaw; one young man was shot by a jealous woman—and there were other instances.

All this happened before the misshapen son of Deldohara had come to an age and strength to undertake his mother's charge. Then the fellow appeared, and with the arrogance of one commissioned in vengeance, summoned Delano to him. Delano went. He did not say so, but I know that he went hopeful for peace.

He was greatly shocked to see this thing that was his son. The fellow must sardonically have exaggerated his ugliness to give Delano that much greater horror.

"Your own fat little pudgy body will never be touched, unless I feel more like it than now," said his son, Horrezko, with imperious insolence; "but that woman that has taken my mother's place—you may as well get ready to bury her! Oh, yes, I know you've tried to hide her away; but I'll get her, I'll get her!"

The monster seemed gleeful, pleased, not angered but worse than angered—delighted.

Delano, the epicure, rich, courteous, humbled himself with apprehensive eagerness to do something generous—that is, really trying to bribe the fellow to make peace; and Horrezko jeered him.

FROM that day, every few months at most, he received some token that let him know he was not forgotten, and always there was the menace of the suspended sword; but Horrezko himself had withdrawn into labyrinthine shadows and could not be found—otherwise it is likely that Zitka would have carried death to him on a dagger's point, or have tried to; and the misshapen, but also powerful, dwarf knew it.

"—and that dear lady—" Delano was speaking of Claude Genlis' mother—"I did everything in the world that could be done to protect her and the child. I sent her to San Francisco in a special car, guarded with armed men. There, her house was watched inside and out, every hour of the day and night by guards. But the curse reached her—one dark night she took poison by mistake for her sleeping potion; and who, who sir, shall not say it was the terrible shade of Deldohara that guided my Claudia's groping hand to the poison?—That was many, many years ago."

So it was from that day many years ago that Delano had furtively, secretly, sheltered Claude Genlis; and he had hoped to cheat Fate by keeping away from the boy. Delano even ventured to hope that the dread Horrezko had not known of the boy's existence. From a distance he had watched the boy with increasing pride and love; and as he had no way of showing affection except with money, the boy's mythic inheritance grew and grew as never before an estate was enriched under guardian's management. Then by the unresting curse (so it seemed) the man who was acting as guardian met his death in an automobile accident, and Claude was pitched into the world with but

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little experience and all pockets bulging with money.

Delano then desperately dared fortune by venturing into a casual acquaintance with his own son; and the boy, as if unconsciously sensing the great love that this elderly gentleman had for him, responded to the friendship with an eagerness that, while it delighted Delano, terrified him; for he had got it fatalistically into his belief that anything more than casual friendship with him was deadly.

"Ah, how my boy needs a wise strong friend, somebody to guide him. Perhaps I have done an extremely unwise thing in putting so much money at his disposal; but there are so few ways that a rich man can feel he has done something for those he wants to favor.

"Claude is a wonderful boy, a beautiful boy—honorable. Unfortunately he had formed an attachment for this woman, Xandra. She is a better woman than I had thought, since she is speaking of herself in saying it is not well for the boy to love her. I am sure she wrote it—see, it is signed 'X', and he has told me of her. Ah, women! How impossible to understand their generous caprice and their capricious anger. I am sure she has written this letter, but how can she have learned—she must refer to—oh, I cannot bear to think of it! Horrezko!

"And my boy, my poor boy! I fear those around him are the sort that go to a rich boy as flies go to spilled sugar; and youth cannot be wise. Only lucky. I cannot take him under my arm—that would be greatly to increase his peril. I am afraid—afraid!"

He was no longer Henri Delano, man of the world, masked, gracious, half-amused with life and wholly pleased, sensitively fastidious about his clothes and manner. He was now a poor old man, with beard that quivered from trembling jaw, soft hands that shook, and somehow the very curves of his well-rounded body sagged; the eyes glowed, but with more the look of sorrow than alertness. The wooden serpents of the master carver ran out from behind his chair, half encircling him; and suddenly they seemed symbolic.

Claude Genlis was up near twenty-five. At his age, for seven years I had been making a living off card tables, with men more deadly than any mysterious hunchback on the watch to catch me when I was not looking, and so ease the sieve-like ghosts of some of their friends who had made an untimely departure from this earth. I guessed that nurse-maids, tutors, boarding-schools, had made young Genlis into a pretty, soft boy, capricious, vastly concerned over socks and ties, with no iron in him.

"Send him to me some day. I would like to meet the youngster."

Delano rose out of his chair with hands outstretched with rewarding thankfulness.

"He knows of you. He has often talked of you. He would listen to you—to anything you said. And—and I have nothing to offer you in return. I am a wretched old man with nothing, nothing but money!"

I went away. I left an old man, crumbled, settling like a dead weight between the menacing half circles of the thick-bodied serpents, whose heads seemed alive, watchful.

People who are filled with superstition have nothing left within them but their fears and dread. It was nonsense, folly—this fortune-telling rigmarole. Suddenly I paused, struck motionless in the remembrance of what Zitka had said to me. For a moment I hesitated, tempted to go back up the stairs and say I would not meet that boy, I would have nothing to do with him; I would do nothing to fulfil anybody's prophecy. But I do not do childish, silly things; so I went on.

It was beginning to show the morning's light when I left, just edging into dawn. On the wide marble-like steps of the Leonardo, a lean bedraggled creature crouched, bucket and brush beside her, and she rubbed the stone with cloth that there might be no water stain left from the cleansing. She turned her old age-broken face toward me; and there was a startled guilty look on it, as if she should not have allowed herself to be caught even scrubbing an entrance sacred to wealth; then with long arm-reaching swipes she went on polishing the white stones.

## CHAPTER X

*Youth and Folly go together, but Youth carries a pardon in its hand for the Fool—until some Woman tears it up.*

AS I came into my rooming-house late the next afternoon, Mrs. Dupper pounced on to me. She came out from behind the living-room curtains with the directness of one leaving an ambush.

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Mrs. Dupper had a long flat-footed mannish stride that did not jibe very well with the "widow lady in reduced circumstances" rôle, but it helped to make her roomers pay promptly in advance. Like most crookwomen she had an acid wit, and often you had to look behind her words to get their meaning.

"Mr. Richmond?"

As she spoke she swung her face right and left with the watchful air of one who knows that walls have ears.

"Just a minute, please."

Her tone was coldly peremptory, as if about to ask what I meant by having an electric plate in my room, or ask some such thing. She, too, lived behind a mask. Every one does. Naked feelings are swathed, corseted, draped. There is more shame about them than about bodies that are pimpled, padded breasts, knocked knees; particularly when those feelings are humane, tender, warmly kind.

She lowered her voice conversationally, but the tone had the sharpness of a bee's buzzing:

"In the front across the hall from you, an actor and his wife—you know? They moved today."

Her face turned, the eyes darted watchfully up the stairs, over her shoulder, around behind her.

"Went out unexpectedly. Gave up their rooms to *'friends'!*"

The word was stressed warningly, accompanied by a glance that would have made a statue know something was wrong.

"Two men; well dressed, good clothes, money, manners and look honest—which made *me* suspect them."

She narrowed her cold eyes, clamped down the thin lips, nodded her head sharply.

"Any man that takes the trouble to *look* honest, I tell you there is something wrong with him. He's up to something. Ev-er-ry time. And when he's in my house, I make it my business to find out what it is he's up to! This town is full of crooks, and these days a crook has to look like an honest man or starve—like honest men do."

She glanced around her, eyed the stairs, then ventured a quick cold smile.

"I knew they weren't friends of that actor. You can tell. At least I can. At least—" her eyes warily darted behind her, leaped overhead at the balustrade—"at least I can after I have listened at the door. Don't I have to know what is going on in my house? The kind of people that are in it? I do—and I do!"

She nodded, tensely, emphatic, and her icy gaze settled on my face as if accusingly.

"They hadn't been in there twenty minutes, and were talking of you! Strangers, just moved in, and knew who was across the hall. They paid that actor to get out. I just thought I would tell you."

"Of me, eh?"

"Of Don Everhard. I thought you might be interested."

There was a glint of amusement in her cold eyes, but I thanked her soberly. She watched me closely, curiously. I could tell that she was far from done; that something important was still on tap.

"About an hour ago there was a man to see you. *He* asked for Mr. Richmond."

Pause. I waited without impatience.

"He came in a closed car. A blond boy—seemed to have a chill. So the maid said. I didn't see him. He wanted to know what time you would be in, all about you. He said that he would wait a while."

Mrs. Dupper's eyes again darted down the hall, up the stairs. She had been trained in the school which teaches that a good deal of caution is better than a lot of wonder as to how the beans were spilled.

"I did not see him. But—" her words fell into a whisper and the words flashed—"I saw his car leave. It was empty. I happened to be looking out of the window. Maybe he walked. Or maybe—" the eyes roved watchfully as she talked—"he went into the room across the hall from yours!"

She stopped, then touching my arm looked all around quickly and spoke fast:

"For Heaven's sake, be careful—for yourself. Those fellows are bad ones. Not the nervous boy. I didn't see him. The others. I heard one of them say the first thing to do was to get a good look at you. And the other—" she was cautiously watchful as a sneak-thief with his fingers in the till—"listen. He said, *'No need of that if we catch him asleep!'* Look out!"

She had caught sight of a noiseless girl down the hall. It was the maid coming through to turn on the lights, for it was rapidly growing dark. Mrs. Dupper's voice changed:

"The young man waited quite a while, but I don't think he left a message. Anna?

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You said the young man left no message for Mr. Richmond?"

Anna was a square-faced girl with big nearly stupid eyes, which concealed the sharp watchfulness of an experienced maid. She said the young man had left no message.

I went up the stairs. The upper hall, as yet unlighted, was dim. I walked with just a little more heaviness than was natural; not much, but a little. I was wearing a long light-weight coat and carried a light stick. I put my hat on after I left Mrs. Dupper.

At my door I paused a moment, looking down and around at the door directly across the hall and I saw it open slightly. Some one there was cautiously peering out to catch a glimpse of me.

Mrs. Dupper had been right. With that insight, almost instinct, which most women, but all crook-women, have, she had at a glance sensed that the new roomers were the sort of fellows who would be the better for a good deal of watching.

In the moment that I paused I learned, too, that somebody had been in my room. I seldom lock a door when I leave it, because there are but few locks that will keep out the sort of men that want to go through them; and an unlocked door is as good as bars and chains at keeping out honest men. But I always like to know what has been going on in my absence. Too, I am interested in the chance that somebody may be waiting for me. A little caution is often a fine substitute for much bravery; so up near the top of the door, across the crack, I often stick a little thread-like piece of wax which is dislodged whenever the door has been opened. True enough a chamber-maid may open it; but chamber-maids seldom return to a room after their work is done; and now and then I am troubled by uninvited parties getting in my room to wait for me.

I thought, of course, that my new neighbors across the hall had been busy looking over the ground; then withdrawn—perhaps. But I never take chances. I knew there was somebody watching behind me, across the hall. I did not know but that there might be somebody waiting for me, just ahead.

It is usually a good thing to out-guess the other fellow's move—even if he hasn't been as clever as you think. So without either haste or hesitancy, and with an eye watchfully turned backward, I opened the door, pressed on the light, and as the door swung open I searched the room.

No one was in sight. But I really hadn't expected any one to be in sight, even if waiting for me; but as I closed the door, I acted precisely as if I knew there was somebody behind it—and there was.

An intruder almost instinctively lurks behind the door if he wishes to take you by surprize. He is sheltered, hid, and catches you from the rear. The very desirability of that position as a hiding-place is its weakness, for a suspicious incomer looks there first.

So it was that the masked fellow with the small gun who was backed into the corner was much more astonished than myself. He had reason to be. My automatic had a mouth big enough to have swallowed his spit-fire toy, and I looked even much more at ease than I felt as I indifferently pushed the door closed.

Of course, I had not cared to have the watcher across the hall amused at my gun-drawing precautions. I never care to entertain spectators, anyway; so I had tried not to seem cautious, and my coat had concealed, from behind, the gun that I presented muzzle-on to the astonished visitor. Nor would I have felt any sense of shame at all if no one had been there. I take the precautions, and if the danger doesn't exist—so much the better luck for the danger.

In a rapid glance I knew many things about this fellow; and I had the strong suspicion that we had met before, recently. He was evidently the blond young man who had appeared to have a chill while waiting for me. I knew that he was about as experienced in dangerous work as in building bridges to the moon—but that he did have a lot of unmitigated courage, chill or no chill.

I did not take the time to think about it, of course, but I knew in a flash what, if put into words, would have been something like this:

"It may be that this fellow has come in here on his own hook with an ax of his own to grind; or it may be that he has some connection with the new neighbors across the hall. With a little manipulation perhaps I can pull his story out of him. But in any case, I do not intend to entertain eavesdroppers, or give them the satisfaction of knowing what is going on. He has got

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altogether too much nerve for his experience in the world, and unless handled carefully is likely to do something rash."

As it was, I said nothing at all. I looked at him, not menacingly, not friendlily; just a little amused.

I wasn't amused, but there was no need for him to know that. I was far less sure than I appeared that he might not pull the trigger. Any day or night of any week, I would rather that a tough, hardened, old highwayman took the drop on me than some green chap who has just started out as a stick-up man and could be scared off with a "Boo!" Young fools are so anxious to prove to themselves that they are not cowards that often they kill where a brave man would even knuckle under; and in moments of that kind it is the psychological "drop" that counts.

I reached out unhurriedly, half-smiling, my eyes on his. He stood rigid, nervous. My fingers touched his hand, but my eyes did not move.

I closed on his small gun, deflected the muzzle, and by gentle pressure, just a slow easy twist so as not to arouse him, took it from his hand. I dropped it into my pocket, then touched my lips warningly, gesturing that he was not to speak. I looked at him for a moment, appearing still amused, even a little more kindly, as if I knew more than he thought, and did not greatly blame him—which, in a way, was true.

I locked the door, leaving the key in it; and whispering, "Quietly," pointed toward the next room.

He went with reluctant puzzlement, the silk white handkerchief still tied about his face to conceal the features.

I lingered at the door, listening; but there was not a sound, not the faintest movement outside. I wondered, almost convinced, if it were possible that my mysterious neighbors had no connection with this fellow. Surely if so, they would have been outside, listening, mystified by the silence, making some sort of movement at the sound of footsteps leaving the room. But there was not the least squeak, creak or whisper. And on inaudible tip-toes I left the door.

MY BEDROOM was rather small and furnished with that refinement of meagerness which it pleases landladies the country over to speak of as "elegant." There had been no lost motion in fitting it, no moving in of things that were not needed. Bed, chair, table and reading-light; a milk-white counterpane—skimmed-milk white, for it had a faint bluish tinge; a reddish rug, warm to the feel of bare feet and in color too; all of which was comfortable and pleasing enough for me, but my guest looked about him like some half-tamed animal in a place that didn't quite please. I closed the door and gestured at the chair. We were well beyond the ears of eavesdroppers.

He hesitated about sitting, turning this way and that, and peering with difficulty at times over the edge of the handkerchief.

"Why not remove it?" I asked.

He stared at me, then with a defiant jerk, pulled it off.

"Just as I thought. Mr. Harrison Frederick, I believe."

He had a troubled scowl on his forehead as if trying to look challenging when he really felt like begging my pardon. Yet, somehow, he seemed unaffectedly natural.

I asked what he had wanted. He hesitated, moved his dry lips, wet them a time or two, started to speak, and became silent.

"Sit down. At least be comfortable."

He shifted from one foot to another, looked behind him, braced himself to speak, then sat down heavily and stepped on one of his feet.

"You came to see me this afternoon and I was out. You waited, grew impatient, sent away your car, slipped up here—and here we are. What is it all about? Repaying me for our little meeting the other evening?"

It surprized him that I knew so much. I fancied that he even felt a little cheated. It was almost unfair that I had known—or appeared to know—that he was behind the door.

"I'm sorry," he said.

Somehow he was apologizing, not begging off. Impulsively—

"I'm *not* a thief."

I was in no hurry to use pincers on him and pull out answers. For all his youth and softness there was a stubborn angle at the base of his jaw that had to be evaded. Besides I am willing to think that anybody who comes into my room and waits for me with a gun, even a little fire-cracker affair, has some metal in his backbone.

"I don't know what got into me to—to—enter your room. I just—I told my chauffeur not to wait more than twenty minutes.

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When he drove off—I—I hadn't intended—I don't know. I thought maybe you *were* in your room, and the maid didn't know. I came up. I tried the door, just to see. Then—honest, I am not a thief!"

I knew that as well as he did; and probably as well as he, I knew what he wanted; nevertheless that did not keep me from asking. Abruptly, as if to defend himself, or at least justify himself by accusing me, he lifted his face, now red as fever:

"I came to appeal to you, to ask you to do something that was right, then—I knew it would do no good—nothing I could say. So I—I—then I—I determined to force you."

I looked him over with a flicker of new interest. Here was a nice little ginger-bread boy, not quite baked through, who had undertaken to force me! I rather liked him. He was really a good-looking boy—a fine toy for some woman's chatelaine. She would dangle and jingle him, rattle the dollars out of his pocket; and be greatly pleased, amused, merry, for about as long as little girls usually are with a boy doll. Perhaps I unkindly misjudge little girls—but not the big ones.

Yet by that irony which must so amuse the gods, since they use much of it, this Harrison Frederick had somehow touched the affection of the most heartless of women. I rather liked him myself.

I knew very well that he had come without being sent. Zoronna would not have let him come. Even if she had wanted to get rid of him she wasn't the woman to throw young boys into the fire. I had wondered if one reason that she had crooks or at least night-hawks in her train was not so she could claw them up at times and know it was no more than they deserved; but, of course, it wasn't a serious "wonder" with me.

Zoronna lived a shady, half-desperate life. She was always on the ragged edge of trouble. She was, I firmly believe, as addicted to the thrill of desperation as some women are to morphin; though I doubt if she knew it, or even thought she would not have cared for a peaceful, quiet life.

What she wanted, and was mad to have, was, of course, that confession; but she would never have sent this Harrison Frederick to get it—more likely she would have come herself; and likely as not she would have come smiling, even gaily amused, treating it all as a joke, but dangerous as a viper-haired fury. She was a great actress, especially off the stage. I said to him, quietly—

"Just what is it you came after?"

His face had gone pale. The blood had gone back to his heart, and he was now half-chilled.

"You know," he said with effort, scarcely getting the words out. I nodded a little, answering—

"But do you?"

Three or four times he swallowed, and his cheeks burned hot again. He raised his voice with inflectional emphasis, strained, protesting:

"It isn't true! She did not—she did not—not—not——"

He couldn't bring himself to say it. To a sensitive, refined nature, and this boy had such a nature—there is something repugnant in the very word "murder" when applied to some one dearly regarded.

"I see. She told you everything?"

His sigh came from the depths of himself, and was his answer.

"She told you my name?"

He nodded, embarrassed. I could tell that he knew it, and that he had dared come anyway. As I have often remarked, youth is a great age. I liked him for that rashness. He knew that I was what is called a "killer"—a disgusting thing to call anybody; he had seen a dead man at my feet; but he came anyway. I did not believe that she had told him everything; so I said—

"She told you I had made her sign it at the point of a gun?"

His head quivered a little, by which he meant—

"Yes."

So that was it.

"And did she tell you it was for sale—her confession?"

Falteringly, but determined, he answered—

"She said you hated her—and—and wanted to get a fellow out of prison."

"Didn't she tell you that my friend was already out? That he escaped?"

"Yes. She showed it to me in the paper."

"Yes, I saw that."

"And she got you to come and try to get it from me?"

"No!"

He was indignant at the idea.

"Then what happened? Why did you come?"

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No answer.

"How did you know where to find me?"

Silence, as he stared at me; and the stubborn angle in his jaw came out a little more prominently.

"Shall I call in your friends across the hall for a little conference?"

By the honest blankness of his blue eyes, I saw that he knew nothing of anybody across the hall. He said that he did not know what I meant.

"Well then, shall I call in the police and the reporters?"

That nearly upset him.

"You won't—you don't mean—you don't —don't——"

"Don't dare? Is that what you are trying to say?"

It was, but he wouldn't admit it.

"By the way, what disposal did you make of that body the other night?"

He shook his head, distressed. It was unpleasant to think about. I waited, and the silence made him feel that he must say something; so he said:

"Za—I mean Miss—Miss Symondi sent me away. I don't know what she did."

"You asked, didn't you? The next day?"

"She said she called a man she knew, and he—he took the—the thing."

"Did it occur to you that for an innocent woman she seemed rather an expert at disposing of—ah—dead men?"

He did not see the sense of my question; only the insult to her; and with strained indignation answered:

"She is a noble woman! The noblest woman on earth!"

"That isn't quite what used to be on the bill-boards. She has changed her distinction. Bad judgment on her part. 'Noblest' won't draw nearly the crowds that 'wickedest' did."

Apologetic and angered, he said:

"That was just for the stage. It wasn't so!"

"You have had a lot of experience, I suppose—to be so positive in your opinions on women?"

He flushed uneasily.

"You are making fun of me. I won't have it—of her, either!"

"No?"

"No!"

"All right then, let us not have any more fun. Let us be serious, Mr. Frederick. What do you propose?"

I could see an idea, a big idea, peering out of his eyes before he got it into words. He had thought of something.

"Let us talk together—like men," he said with an earnestness that almost let his voice get away from him and go into a squeak.

"All right. You begin."

"Let us be businesslike."

The boyish face was red with fever-flush.

"Surely."

I also was beginning to have a new idea—a way to find out this young man's name.

"How much will you pay? My friend is out of prison. I really have no need for——"

With the insistence of a man who has always seen a price tag on everything he wanted, and who has always had more than enough to pay, he said that I could name my price. He was young, very young. Money is no more the root of evil than a bee's sting makes the honey-pot bad for children's bellies; but like most of the young people and old ones of this day, and of all other days, he believed that the taste of gold was sweet to everybody. As a gambler and underworld figure I would surely be susceptible to money.

He demanded my price. I said I had no way of knowing that his check would be good, and that he certainly did not have enough money on him.

"You could stop payment on a check," I told him.

And it was a check I wanted, though I did not say so in just those words. He reflected a moment and saw that it was true; but with naive earnestness said—

"But I wouldn't!"

He was agitated. The handkerchief was still knotted around his neck. He lifted it and wiped sweat from his face.

"Ten thousand?" I asked.

He was honestly troubled.

"I would pay it—but—I haven't that much in checking account. But, honest, first thing in the morning I'll be at the bank and cover the check. Will you?"

Out came a check-book, and he stared anxiously. I nodded.

"Make out the check and let me see it," I said.

Hurriedly he bent over my table, and with trembling hand wrote. No sacrifice of danger or money was too great for him to make for her, a rogue-woman. It is only for rogue-women that men do sacrifice themselves; the other kind of women do not



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require, will not permit, sacrifices. It seems to me that good women ought to manage it so they can at least be wicked enough to use up the gallantry, the love-recklessness, the great moth-folly, that is in men—and doing so save a great part of mankind from the wreckage dumps where sirens throw the skin and bones of ruined lovers. Such counsel must sound sinful to good women; and they fly from it with hands to ears; and no doubt they are wise. But by one of the flukes on the part of Providence a good woman can not play the vampire—at least convincingly.

He jerkily tore the check from its book and held it out to me. I took it glanced at it, shook my head slowly and offered it back to him. He was stricken quite dumb. From the clouds he had tumbled right down to my feet with nothing to break his fall. Every bone in his body was broken, or might as well have been, for the good they did him at that moment. He had so vividly seen himself rushing to her, restoring to her something of great value, thrusting out to her what he, alone, had taken from Don Everhard, and getting his bosom all wet with her pearly tears, joyfully shed, that he went wabbly as if turned to gelatine.

I held out my hand, the check between my fingers, offering it to him. I held it, waiting. He half-reached for it, then drew back, refusing. As his arm fell away, his eyes caught mine. I was not amused, and I did not pretend to be. The check I slowly tore in two. In the agitation of writing it out he had forgotten himself; and it was signed—

**Claude Genlis**

## CHAPTER XI

*It is always a pleasure to watch other people make mistakes.*

ZORONNA—Xandra, pronounced, as always, with a "Z." And here was the boy that cadaver-faced prophet had mentioned.

"Who wears the yoke must go as the goad points."

Probably an ancient proverb. I resented the imputation that I would ever wear a yoke for anybody, for even Fate herself. Yet I had said:

"Send him to me some day. I would like to meet him."

Here he was; and I eyed him so steadily that he was uneasy, almost afraid. I decided it would be wise to spend a little thought on the matter before saying or doing much of anything. I got off the bed, and with a sweep of my hand put the small room at his disposal.

"You might as well turn in. You are spending the night here."

"What?"

"Suit yourself then."

He arose, saying—

"I most certainly shan't remain."

"You misunderstand. You may lie down or pace the floor. But you are spending the night here."

That was plain enough for any man, and he knew what it meant; though he said—

"But—er—" And quit.

There was nothing more to be said, though for a moment, with youth's unconscious frankness, he looked at me with an expression ridiculously like a pup that is being shut up in a room without at all understanding why.

"You may try to slip out—if you wish."

Having said that, I watched him for the length of three or four pulse beats. Then I went quietly out of the door, closing it behind me. I knew that he would not try to slip out. All my life I have been fortunate in having people understand what I meant; that is, at those times when it was fairly important that they should.

I walked back and forth across the room for a turn or two, but there is not enough restlessness in me to make it worth while to move about when I am thinking. I never fidget, jiggle my feet, tap with my fingers. I seldom sleep more than three or four hours, and it doesn't bother me much if I don't get that. I have been told by medical men that the reason is because I am not nervous. I don't use myself up and wear out energy. I eat no more than I want, so the rest of my body does not have to be unconscious while the stomach does its work. I do not worry, ever; and I am rarely tired. When I do sleep, I am usually awakened by anything heavier than a feather's fall.

I turned out the light and sat down; and when I sit down I sit still.

I could hear Genlis moving about. He would take a few flat-footed strides, but the smallness of the room did not lend itself to striding. He would stand quiet for a time,

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hen heavily shuffle from one foot to another. He sat down, got up, moved the chair.

An hour went by. Once he came to the door, quietly. His hand touched the knob. He, listened but did not turn it. I am sure that he looked from the window, but it was a good twenty feet down, with nothing but the ground to stop him. Anyway, he didn't try it. Now and then he would move about with petulant stamping. There would be long periods of quiet.

Another hour or more went by. His situation was so different from any that he had ever heard about that he was having trouble to feel that it was just as he found it. If I had tied him up, or sat over him with a gun, he would have understood. But to be told without any definite menace to stay in a room—he couldn't understand why he obeyed.

At last I heard the muffled thump as he threw himself down heavily on to the bed, though he had not undressed. He did not intend to sleep. He was tired. Long pauses, with turnings and sound of movement. The bed did not creak. I would not have a bed that creaked. I knew that he dozed.

Time went on. Midnight long ago had brought its silence upon the house.

*Tick-cick-click!*

I looked toward the hall door. My room was unlighted, but I had been in the dark so long my eyes were used to the blackness; and though I could see only vaguely, I had no feeling of being unable to see. Besides, it was my room and even in the dark I had all the intimacy with it that the blind have with their rooms.

The most delicate and skilful of fingers were at work, and the quietness would have been uncanny, except that I never have shivers and chills. When ghosts of dead men begin sifting through solid walls, and make me see and feel themselves, then I shall probably be fearful and have shivers; until then I shall know that there is nothing but flesh and brain behind every mystery and danger—and with anything like an even break I will risk my flesh and brain against any man's. I dare do this largely because of my extreme caution.

My door was unlocked with the delicate precision of a safe expert feeling the tumblers fall; then pause, a listening silence.

At first as a matter of precaution for such emergencies as might turn up, and afterward as a matter of habit, I have for some years been buying my shoes through an agency that caters to a special class. They are not only well-made, comfortable shoes, but guaranteed not to creak. In that regard they are no better, if as good, as sneakers, or rubber-soled shoes, but much less suspicious in the eyes of people who might wonder why you happened to be wearing or carrying them. In the making of a certain kind of livelihood, in which some of my friends have in the past been engaged, it is necessary to look out for all manner of such details.

So on noiseless shoes, and cautiously as if creeping up to cut the whiskers from a sleeping lion, I moved to the fire-place. Before this was a paneled screen, three and a half feet, or thereabout in height. It had originally been intended for a wood fire, but a gas log had been installed in the grate.

Behind the screen I crouched down on my knees and one elbow. The position was anything but restful, and certainly without dignity; but it had the advantages that I wanted—particularly that of offering a sort of ambush in the rear of the enemy who was entering with evident designs on my bedroom.

I waited, and when I wait I do it with a stolid persistence that every time, or almost every time, over-reaches the other fellow's cautions. Whoever was coming into my rooms knew his business; and was not only quiet, careful, deliberate, but bold. I did not hear the door open, and whoever can turn a knob without the least sound is not merely coolly delicate in touch but has taken the precaution of shooting oil into the works. I did not hear the door open, as I have said, but with an eye at the crack in the paneling of the screen I could tell when it was open, and vaguely make out blurred shapes. My neighbors from across the hall were coming in—or right at that moment they were hesitating, for the streak of phosphorescent-like glow under the doorway of my bedroom gave them something to think about.

There is a way of talking, much in use among convicts and crooks at large, which carries words with scarcely any sound; it is a kind of whisper, but without the sibilant quality that whispering usually has. The value of it lies in the fact that it can be

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heard but not overheard—except by one much closer to the voice than any one is supposed to be. And I heard the almost inaudible words—

"That bird's awake!"

Motionless silence, minutes of it, while they listened tensely.

"Maybe he's dozed off."

Silence, watchful, waiting silence. Then—

"We got to go through with this."

"You said it."

With a trace of grimness mixed into irony—

"Wasn't me that said it. Those're her words."

"I got you the first time."

"Shh-h-h!"

All of us listened. From within the bedroom came a slight muffled sound of heavy breathing that was almost a snore; but in a moment or two the tired boy turned, squirmed into a more comfortable position, and the sound ceased.

"This is going to be easy."

"But that bird *will* shoot. She said he wasn't overrated a bit. 'Member?"

"One whiff of this—and we should worry."

"But let's be careful."

"Matter with you?"

"He's a little out of our line, that's all."

"They're all alike when they get a bit of the old juice up their snouts."

They had come into my room on feet that were soundless as if they walked on air, and closed the door with a noiselessness that would have baffled any unsuspecting ears. The eye of an electric torch light blazed for a moment, sweeping the floor and glancing around the walls, then went out and they stood poised as motionlessly as if turned into sticks. They had the caution that makes bold men doubly dangerous; but perhaps it was my vanity which made it seem that they felt the need of an excessive amount of that caution. Their patience was unusual, their motionlessness exasperating to the ache in my uncomfortably bent knees and elbow.

The old house was well made, having been built for a home when the neighborhood was not without a fashionable air and solid material was put into place by honest workmen—so the floor had no creaks in it. Like shadows they went across the room, with now and then a quick lightning-rapid flash of the spotlight. They had ceased talking. I sensed at the time that they were working together like fellows who knew what they were about. There was no need of words. They knew how to play their parts in pantomine—and I understood just what that pantomine was to be when a sharp sweet odor of increasing strength, unmistakable chloroform, reached my nose.

With the cautious touch of a devil meddling with holy relics, a hand touched the knob of the bedroom. He must have turned it a hundredth of an inch at a time. There was not the faintest sound and I was not only listening acutely but knew what he was about.

The door opened slightly, just a small crack's width. The fellow stared within; and reassured, satisfied, opened the door wide. They were silhouetted. I could see that he who opened the door held a gun advanced. He entered first. Not a word was spoken. Not a sound was made.

Rapidly, noiselessly, his companion went in after him. The odor of chloroform was stronger.

I could not see more, but I did not need my eyes to know. There was the expert assurance of much rehearsal, even practise, in their methods. With such noiselessness the victim would hardly be awakened at all; and if awakened, his eyes would first fasten on the gun thrust into his face; and a moment later, unresistingly, his nose and mouth would be covered with a lethal cloth.

They had been helped by the light that was burning; and they were businesslike as surgeons, speaking but little and then with monosyllabic abruptness. No bunglers, these fellows; no novices to be tickled into talking about their luck.

"Gone?"

"Not quite."

Silence.

"Quick work."

"Seems like it."

"Funny he hadn't undressed."

"Easier for us."

"Sure."

Pause.

"He's under. Could take out his 'pendix."

"Take out more than his 'pendix, she will."

"I bet it's so!"

"Here's where our real work starts."

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"Easy. He's under a hundred an' fifty."

"Take a slant up and down the hall, Pete. That landlady sure looks like a sleepless old hen. I hope there's no mistake *this time*, like on that last job, about the car being around the corner."

"I got the signal."

"Sure. We thought we had it then too. An' there we were, nursin' two hundred pounds o' beef while that cop wanted to know all about our soused friend!"

"See if the road's all clear."

A shadow came from the bedroom, crossed the hall door, looked out, listened patiently, and went back, saying:

"Everybody's dead. All clear, George."

"She said, 'Bring him here—*alive*, or come on a slab yourselves.' Guess we're following orders."

"Sure. Get your arm under his neck. Steady—that's it. Now. Oop! All right."

"All set."

"Here we go!"

And out they came. The larger of them had Genlis swung across his back, and walked much more easily than I would have thought possible, for he was not a big fellow. The other slipped ahead, like a watchful scout, ready to warn, and if too late for a warning to be of value, ready to use his gun to win a passage.

I let them pass. I had eased my elbow and was down on my hip to rest my knee-caps. It had been in my mind that when they emerged from the bedroom they should have a little surprize to remember in their old age; but I let them pass, and gave them such silent blessings as seemed most likely to help them in safely carrying their precious burden to the feet of Zoronna.

Undoubtedly, in spite of the way he had explained it, Genlis had come so cautiously up to my room that the fellows did not notice his entrance into my room; or perhaps they were at the moment busy with something else. Anyway, they hadn't suspected the presence of a second person.

They were methodical, unagitated workmen, and closed my hall door gently after them.

Then I undressed and got into bed; but I did not sleep until almost daybreak. As I do not dream, I knew that sleep would not be nearly so pleasant as the entertainment I gave myself with picturing Zoronna and her captive. Besides, it seemed to me, that in a way I had put the kibosh on that prophecy about my protecting him, or whatever it was that I had been ordered by Fate to do.

## CHAPTER XII

*When the devil himself is afraid to tackle a fellow, he sends a woman.*

THUMP-BANGETY-BANG!

Mrs. Dupper's fist on my hall door sounded as if she wanted to give me alarm over fire. I knew it was Mrs. Dupper because no one else would have made so much noise. The maid would have been gentle. Such visitors as I have are carefully respectful.

I looked at my watch. Twenty minutes of nine. An unearthly hour to be disturbed. I am not an early riser however early I may awake, and I had been reading by the bed-side light, with blinds drawn.

*Thump-thump-thump! Rattle-thumpety-bump!*

Hurry is a waste of time. Haste doesn't save nearly as many people as it kills. I never rush. I got into a long dressing-gown, almost solidly black—I have almost a widow's weakness for dark cloth—and going to the door, discreetly poked out my long nose.

"How you do sleep!" Mrs. Dupper cried. "I have been knocking for an hour. There's a gentleman below, a very agitated gentleman. He insists that he must see you at once. I told him—but he told me he *must* see you, that he is Mr. Delano—" Mrs. Dupper looked all around, her icy gaze flashing up and down the hall to be sure of spotting any eavesdropper. "—Henri Delano, you know. He said he just *had* to see you, and I thought——"

Delano came up. His gray eyes looked tired; and the thick, closely trimmed, dark-stained beard, seemed now really a part of a disguise, a part of a mask to conceal the age in his face.

I never before had noticed how small were his feet, and the neat, specially built shoes were perhaps a little tight; for—odd, isn't it?—the men or women who have small feet will often torment themselves to make those feet appear smaller. He had been nursing fears for twenty years, yet was conspicuously well fed. If he had been losing money he would have grown thin.

There is an old fable of a Doctor Faustus who traded his soul to the devil for twenty years of pleasure; and though the fable is

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vague on that point, I am sure Faustus' body grew into bulging lines. Illness and money loss wreck a man's flesh; but Delano, while carrying a load of fatalistic anguish, was having to conspire with his tailor to keep from looking fat. His pearl-gray vest was drawn tight as if it had been fastened with a button-hook; and it was hard to guess how, without the aid of a shoe-horn, he had been slipped into his coat, which had padded shoulders that gave him an air of military erectness.

He did not take the chair I offered; but holding hat and stick in one hand, put out the other in an unconscious gesture of helplessness.

"Claude has disappeared!"

Delano was too schooled in good manners to let emotion willingly make him awkward. I said nothing, but with hands to dressing-gown pockets, waited.

"He did not return to his apartment last night—or send word. I am afraid."

He was near to giving way, but braced himself in an attitude of resistance, leaning a little heavily on the gold-studded ivory handle of his cane. Then, without agitation and without hope, said:

"I know something bad has happened. I feel it."

He meant it; believed it; yet said it almost casually. In one hand he still held his hat and stick, and the thumb of the other was in a pocket of his pearl-gray vest. After all, he was a thoroughbred gambler, trained to keep his emotions concealed.

I asked reassuringly what reason there was for thinking there was something tragic in an unattached young man's staying away from his rooms for one night?

"It is not that," he said, looking eagerly at me. "You understand? I should never—it was a mistake for me ever to come near the boy. Last night I was to meet him—after dinner—at the club—as though by chance for a casual talk. He did not come. He sent no word. I feel— I had given him your address—you said, remember—and I thought may be——"

He broke off, the feeling growing too strong for his voice; yet he set the facial muscles, and the mask did not slip.

I would probably have reassured him, even with explanations, and helped him to see the humor of young Genlis' being carried off by a woman who, whatever her flaws of character, was desperately concerned over his welfare; but the situation was so intricate that the story would have required some pains and time in the telling; and just then again there was a knocking at my door. I opened it. Mrs. Dupper was there.

She had scarcely opened her lips before her watchful eyes left me and fastened down the hall; and I looked in the same direction and saw who was coming.

Zoronna Symondi was born with the self-assurance that she had only to show herself and the world would be humble; and somehow she never lost faith in her divine right to rule any man that came near her. She carried herself with haughty aloofness; and there was no more of the coquette in her than in any other woman who knows she does not need to tease men into admiring her.

I have no wish to give the devil his due, except in knocks; but certain things have to be explained in Zoronna to understand her. She was not a vampire, but an imperious man-eater. She might demand, but she would never beg; she might threaten, but she would not cry.

I suppose that if she had felt herself growing old, had become disagreeably conscious of facing and getting washed out, she would naturally have turned to the tricks that all women use when no longer sure of themselves; for when a woman cries, she is cheating—and knows it. Yet such is the fine justice of the Lord, that each of them must fade; and unless she marries and sinks into the shadow of a husband, takes poison, or otherwise extinguishes herself, she must come to the humiliation of being withered.

But the Zoronna that swept with one movement around the banisters, and came down the hall, fur about her throat and hands thrust into a flat muff, head up and purple-black eyes set on my face like an arrow about to leave the bow, was strong with fire that had not even yet begun to leave ashes about her feet. When the stage had known her as Zoronna the Sorceress, with some difficulty and much press work she had achieved the summit of feminine distinction by being known as "the wickedest woman in the world"; and now she looked it.

Mrs. Dupper, in the midst of saying that a woman was below, insistent upon seeing me, but had given no name, turned with icy hostility to greet her, very properly objecting to a young woman's making so free with her respectable house.

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In any warfare this side of tooth and nails, Mrs. Dupper was hopelessly outclassed; but she had the resentment that every woman feels toward a stranger who is younger and better dressed than herself.

Mrs. Dupper stepped back, more rigidly erect than ever, hands severely locked at her waist, and smote Zoronna with a look that would have jarred any other person, saying—

"Madam, you will kindly wait below!"

Zoronna hardly paused. She did not move her hands from her muff. At a glance she saw I was not dressed for visitors, but she was determined to see me at once and alone; besides I believe she would have done anything and said anything rather than permit Mrs. Dupper to have the joy of rebuffing her. So she hardly paused, but gave Mrs. Dupper a flashing, half-amused glance, and spoke—

"My husband." And with the arrogance of wifely prerogative she pushed past me before I had any idea what she was up to, and closed the door.

Zoronna's lips set, her eyes blazed, and because a lifetime of watching gestures has made me alert, I saw the convulsive jerk of her right shoulder that was checked as she became aware of Delano's presence. Swift as a shadow crosses a mirror her manner changed. Her body relaxed, the eyes softened a little, and she smiled, putting out her hand to me, with an air of half-mocking triumph, the very attitude of a wife who is just a little disdainful of a husband whom she rules as she pleases.

I took her hand. I held it hard so that in spite of the jerk, jerk, jerk, as she saw what I was up to, she could not get it free. My back was to Delano; and with my left hand I had reached dartingly into the muff and fastened on to the gun that lay there.

Her eyes flashed menace. Her sharp perfect white teeth gleamed, and her left hand inside of the muff caught at mine; but she played the game, and let nothing escape her that gave Delano an inkling as to what was going on.

As I dropped the gun into my dressing-gown pocket and stepped back, she was smiling. Delano was on his feet, expectant, polite, and at once he bowed, saying—

"Mrs. Richmond, I have long wanted to meet you!"

Over the back of his head as he stooped to the bow, Zoronna shot at me a look of angered bewilderment. I looked at her as expressionlessly as I could. I mentioned Mr. Delano's name, introducing him. At the sound of his name she tightened like a fiddle string at the turn of the key, and regarded him with new interest. Again and again her eyes flashed at me, looking for a cue, hoping I would say something.

I said nothing. And she went on with the wifely rôle, listening to Delano's few perfunctory half-compliments—yet he was almost the last man in the world before whom she would have wished to pose as any man's wife. I saw her agitation because I knew the cause for it and looked for it; but scarcely any one else would have noticed, so well she played the part.

I once read some French book in which the Queen of Sheba, to serve the devil after the fashion of her sex, went to tempt a dried up, bloodless old desert saint; and coaxingly she cried at him—

"I am not a woman; I am a world!"

That is how much variegated mystery, how much playing of rôles and wearing of costumes and masks, there is in most of these women—at least in the audacious ones that have beauty and fire.

Delano, of course, left at once—left me alone with my "wife".

As the door closed after him, I turned and for some time Zoronna and I looked at each other. We stood quietly alert, each waiting for a cue, for the other to say something; and as waiting is one of the things that I do best, she gave way first.

She laughed, half-desperately, forcing herself to it, but with a pert jerk of her head, defiant, unbeaten said:

"As usual, you win. Sit down, I want to talk anyway."

## CHAPTER XIII

*Anger is not courage—it is a substitute that most people use.*

ZORONNA loosened the coil of dark fur at her throat, slipped it back across her shoulders, straightened the muff out across her lap, crossed her ankles, took a cigaret from a small yellow case that dangled from her left wrist, and lighting it, stared up at me through the smoke-mist.

I did not sit down, but crossed my arms and watched her. She was altogether too composed and friendly for my comfort. She smiled. Her lips were beautifully

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molded and red as her own blood. She smiled as if a little embarrassed, but that meant nothing.

"I have a confession to make, Don Everhard."

Her tone was friendly, but seemed to accept the fact that I had the upper hand; but I knew she would not accept any such fact with anything like the composure that she was showing. I would rather have seen her angry. I nodded slightly.

"That's right," she said briskly. "Put on your sphinx manner."

With elaborated unconcern she glanced around until her eyes fastened on a mirror, and a small swift hand waved at it—

"The time you've wasted in front of glasses—posing."

I nodded in agreement. She was playing to set fire to my anger; but I never lose my temper.

"The reason," she said, "that you crawl in your shell, and just stare and nod, is because you're afraid to be natural. Now if I wanted to make my confession to a stick, I'd get a broom, set it up in a corner and talk to the handle."

I dipped my hand into a deep pocket and brought up the little revolver, silver handled with gold inlay; but whoever made it had not been wholly lacking in sense. The barrel was blued. I glanced at it, and dropped it back into the deep pocket. That was all the answer I cared to make. With imperturbable casualness she said:

"You must give that back when I go. I can't get along without it. Always I carry it. Some day I am going to use it—on somebody."

"That is the confession?"

"Yes. In a way."

"I may say that for once I believe you."

"You do well, my friend. I am going to be wholly and completely honest with you." Then tensely, but without bitterness: "I hate you just as much as it is possible for a woman to hate a man. Just as much as it is possible for *this* woman to hate a man. But this day I did not intend to shoot you. I wouldn't hurt you for worlds; and do you know why?"

She was much in earnest, but played with a mocking half-friendly note that I did not like. At her question I shook my head.

"Because it is *my* turn to drive the bargain. I am going to dictate the terms of this one. As for that paper with my ink mark on it—do what you like with it."

I watched her, and made no move and said nothing.

"Why don't you say, 'Something must have happened since we last met?' "

I did not answer. She went on—

"Well it *has*."

"Particularly last night," I said quietly.

She nodded slowly, with suspended menace in her eyes. I realized fully that she was desperate and furious, but, unlike any other woman would have been, she played her part with restraint; and it was an even more desperate part than I suspected that she had to play.

"Do you know," she began with lowness of tone and pause between the word that gave surprizing emphasis to what she was saying, "that *you* are all that stands between me and something a thousand times worse than death—or San Quentin?"

I was completely lacking in any such knowledge and showed it by the way I looked at her.

"And you are going to do everything in your power to protect me."

Hers was a peculiarly threatening tone, especially for one who expected to evoke my protection.

"I am?"

"You are."

"Why?"

"You will know before I am through. But I want you to understand that I hate you with every drop of blood that's in me, and nothing you can do will ever make me feel differently. I shall never forgive you!"

I again lifted the little jeweled gun from my pocket, glanced at it, dropped it back; and asked—

"Why this, then?"

"Oh, I had a silly whim to see you with your hands in the air. It doesn't matter. I wanted to give you a fright; but anyway I have you between—just like that!"

She illustrated by pressing thumb and forefinger together. I shook my head. That wasn't the answer. She had intended to shoot—or almost had intended, anyway.

Her fingers swiftly and delicately played about her red hair, adjusting it. There was nothing to adjust, and she knew it; but the gesture gave her a steadying manner, a poised air. With an effort at cold unconcern, as if the question were unimportant, Zoronna asked:

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"Last night—did you know where that boy was being taken? When those men carried him off?"

"Yes."

"You *did?*"

She jerked herself back, head up, eyes flamingly murderous.

"Yes."

Without taking her eyes from me, she flung her cigaret to the floor. I watched where it fell, stepped on it, and glanced again at her—just in time to step back with the nose of a gun, my own gun, over the top of the dressing-gown pocket, for a knife was in her hand and half-lifted. Her face was clenched with passion, rigid with fury, deadly as a serpent's head.

For a moment I believe that she intended to strike anyway, take death out of the gun's mouth for the wild chance of cutting at me; but I looked from her face to her wrist, and she slowly, fearfully, lowered her hand and, to evade my eyes, put it behind her. She was less afraid of being killed than of having her wrist shattered!

"What are you trying to do? Is this a rehearsal or something?" I asked with as nearly the appearance of sarcastic indifference as I could assume. Accusingly, tense, with her other hand spread claw-like she said—

"You knew to whom they were taking that boy?"

Then I understood; or at least I guessed it: That I might be taken in hand and taught better than to cross her, Zoronna had applied to Horrezko for my punishment and his kidnapers had carried off young Genlis. Coldly I told her:

"I knew only that he was to be taken to where you had intended that I should go." Her composure was gone. She had become unreasonable, though not hysterical. She was not of the hysterical temperament.

"No! No! I won't believe you. You knew everything. You knew what it would do to me—that is why you did it. You knew that for a month I have made that devil think the boy was in Europe—but don't you smile! Don't you dare smile! I am even with you—I have you right there!" She lifted a clenched hand. "You—you—" She hesitated, indecisive but vehement, her eyes flashing with anger and cunning. Then her voice rose triumphantly—

"I know where Bob Calversley is—right here in this city—and you've got to buy me, to help me, to do as *I* say, or I'll kill him!"

I watched her and said nothing.

"You don't believe me?"

"No."

"I wired Hazel Guigane. I knew he'd get in touch with her soon as he could. I wired her to tell him to come to me, that you and I had it all fixed to take care of him. Oh, I was clever enough to use your name too. And last night he got in—he's in my rooms now, sleeping!"

"Where are your rooms?"

Zoronna laughed spitefully. A woman grows weary of being calm, poised.

"I moved again—last night. After—well, if Horrezko catches me! Oh, he's the most awkward thing alive to look at, and moves with the ease and silence of a shadow. Has the manners of a—you know? Dancing teacher. Body of—it's just as if some drunken sculptor had stuck fragments together any-old-how, and the devil had come along in a cynical mood and given the thing life. He is terrible. He is medieval—horrible and fascinating, like some Asiatic despot. Such luxury—and that body—ouh!"

She threw her clenched hands to her eyes and shuddered. I said to her—

"I am more interested in that lie you have just told me than anything else."

She looked up warily, stubborn, defiant.

"I don't believe that you know where Calversley is," I said, "but I can't afford to take the chance. You may."

"I do," she said, almost closing her eyes in the effort to look stern and implacable.

I turned to the door, and she suspected my intention, or at least knew that I intended something.

"I am going to have my landlady call the police. If Calversley is in the city I want him to be able to go about like a free man."

Then she saw how she had trapped herself. Zoronna had no genius for intrigue. Like a poor chess player, in making her attack, she had muddled her defense. She sprang up with:

"No, don't! I lied. Honest, I did! Please don't—yet anyway!"

Anybody who tells one lie will tell another to defend it; but I asked—

"Then what is the truth?"

"I did wire Hazel Guigane—but I haven't heard from Calversley."

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"You wire each change of address, do you?"

"Yes, I do."

"And you haven't heard anything?" I went on.

"Not a thing. Honest."

She was watching me closely, looking straight at me, but with the gaze somehow aslant. I knew something was wrong. I couldn't tell which lie not to believe. So I told her there was only one thing for me to do and that she would have to take me to her rooms so that I could see for myself.

"No! I should say not!" she cried.

"You answer hastily."

"Never! I won't do that."

"You mean merely that you don't want to. As I have reason to believe that my friend Calversley is a fugitive, hiding in your room, where you have lured him, and since I know that he is innocent of the crime—by your confession—" Zoronna glared. She knew herself trapped. She felt words would be wasted. I half-expected her to strike.

"You see I have reasons for wishing to make sure."

She raised both hands, one of which still retained that dagger-like knife, silvery-sharp, as high above her head as she could reach, and with what appeared to me to be far more dramatic earnestness than the situation warranted, said:

"I swear that I am not deceiving you. I do not know where your friend is. I have not heard from him or of him. Let me go—let me go alone, Don Everhard, and—and I will even forgive you!"

I more than half-believed her; but the easiest way I know of to make a mistake is to trust a woman, especially when she is particularly eager to convince you. For an answer I turned the key in the door and took it with me into my bedroom, where I dressed.

When I came out Zoronna was brooding in a chair, staring at the floor and sullenly would not look toward me. But when I had unlocked the door, said, "Now we will go," and stood waiting, she got up at once but would not so much as glance toward me. We went out into the hall where Mrs. Dupper passed us; and she coldly surveyed Zoronna, whose plumage seemed to have become wilted and lusterless.

## CHAPTER XIV

*The Devil is a devil only because he has no pity in him.*

SOMETHING was peculiarly wrong with Zoronna; and I watched her, not quite sure whether she was working herself up into the mood for murder, suicide or reconciliation. For some time we rode along, silent, and like lovers who had fussed, rather than enemies. Naturally I supposed that she was planning some unique mischief, when suddenly she turned on me and said—

"Will you answer one question—truthfully?"

"If I answer at all it will of course be truthfully."

"Who warned you last night?"

My eyes questioned her further.

"Who told you an attempt would be made to carry you off—so that you kept Claude there?"

"No one."

As bitterly sarcastic as her voice could make it she said—

"And *you* never lie."

"If so, I do it skilfully enough not to be suspected. No one warned me."

Her purple eyes fastened on my face with an inquisitor's severe gaze, trying to get at what might be at the back of my head. At last she said, speaking slowly:

"For weeks I have done everything to keep Horrezko from getting his hands on that boy—and you—you sent Claude to him. It was almost as if you knew. Did you?"

There was much the same sort of menace in that question as had been there before when I suddenly had a knife presented to my throat. Zoronna was a thorough tiger woman. She did not use the blandishments and deceits with which feminine treachery usually wraps itself; and with something like calmness, with a sort of dispassionate sincerity, she said:

"If I knew I would kill you. I don't believe it was an accident. And if you—if you think you are going to hurt me by harming that boy—is that what you thought? I believe you and Horrezko are friends. Is that what you thought?"

"He is your friend—not mine."

"No one knows anything about him or his friendships. He never tells anything. I am afraid of him. I always have been afraid of him. He is really a terrible

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creature. After I came back to New York this time he sent for me, and I just gradually got used to him. He is generous. And after the other night—there was nobody else I could turn to. I told him just what you had done. And he laughed! That's what made me suspicious after—after the way things turned out. I remembered how he laughed. But he never tells anything, and it would have been just like him to have warned you if you had been acquainted with him, and sometimes I think you're acquainted with everybody that's—that's evil!"

She looked very righteous and indignant in the saying of that; as though her circle of friends was among the happily pious; and her strong vivid eyes were bitter with reproach.

"But he sent his men, and they had instructions from *you*," I told her.

"That is what they said. But there are times when men lie. You may not know it. But they do. All of them!"

One of the things that had always kept me from disliking Zoronna more than I did—I was in a sense afraid of her; knew she was no woman for a man's friend to love—was the fact that she was never humble and would not make a sickly appeal for sympathy.

"The way he laughed when I told him you had forced me to sign that confession! I know now that there was something behind it—his laughter. The way he looked at me, and chuckled. He said, 'We will have to give your friend a surprize party; we surely will.' And laughed again. 'You too,' he said to me. 'This is magnificent!'"

She went on:

"Now—I didn't think of it then—but now as I look back I almost think *you* had told him all about it, first. But he never tells anything! He is devil enough to have played that trick on me. That is what made me wonder—made me wonder after what happened—if you were not more of his friend than I?"

I shook my head slightly.

"Not so," I told her.

"If I only knew," she said doubtfully and turned her face to the glass. We rode in silence for some time; and I asked—

"If you tried so hard to keep the boy from Horrezko, how does it come that you are now so untroubled about what is to happen to him?"

"How do you know I am untroubled?"

"You have talked of other things. Not of his dangers."

"His dangers are past," she said, turning from me again.

"That sounds like an obituary."

Zoronna whirled, staring at me.

"Don't talk like that to me. You know I hate death. I hate the word 'death.' And I *am* worried. I think of nothing else. If he ever gets Claude again——"

She looked away quickly, breaking off, and I had the feeling that she had not meant to let me know even that much.

"Oh-ho," I said. "Are the dread Horrezko's claws so easily unfastened? He got away, did he? It must be easy then to escape."

"Listen, Don Everhard. I was there, expecting *you*. Oh, I wish it had been you!"

She snapped her sharp little teeth, but somehow, in spite of teeth, knife, threats and all, I knew she was not now as savage as she pretended. She no longer believed that I was in any sort of alliance with Horrezko. That belief is what had made her really murderous.

"Horrezko was up-stairs—with his books. Always with his books! He was up there when they brought the boy in, and told me that you had come. I'll never again—" she tried to look as though she meant it—"never have half the thrill in life as when I believed that, and rushed down and found Claude, half-dazed, sick— Oh, the poor boy thought it was all a nightmare, and he wouldn't talk to me at first. He thought it was a dream!

"Oh, I did a fool thing. I lost my head. I cried at those fellows who brought him—I had told them all about you: 'This isn't the man! You've tricked me! This isn't the man at all! Where did you get this boy?'

"It would have been just like Horrezko to play some such trick on me—to take that way of showing me he knew I had been fooling him for weeks, and have both of us right there in his hand! I was terrified. I was. But I saw, or thought I did, that the fellows were amazed. They swore up and down that they had carried him out of your bedroom.

"'Were you in Everhard's room?' I cried at Claude. All bewildered he said, 'Yes.' In a broken, muddled way he tried to

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tell me what had happened—how he came to be there, and I understood more quickly than he could talk. I simply had to get him away before Horrezko came. I frightened the fellows, or tried to, by saying it would be terrible if Horrezko came in and found they had made a mistake. They helped me get him to the car—and we drove madly away."

"And this morning you suspected that they were in a plot to double-cross you!"

It is, I reflected, impossible to exaggerate the illogic of a suspicious woman.

"But I have no luck," she said wearily. "Those fellows had emptied his pockets—letters, cards, everything, which is what they always do when they catch somebody. They hadn't examined them, of course, and forgot to give them back."

"This Horrezko makes a business of kidnaping, it seems?"

"He does. He gets enormous sums. Horrezko afterward wanted to know all about what had happened—why you had not been brought. He went almost crazy! I learned all about it over the telephone from Julander, his secretary. Julander is my friend."

Pause. Then, resigned, calmly, with no self-pity, detached as if reading from a story—

"Horrezko will kill me."

Presently she asked, and I knew that she had been wondering about it from the first—

"Why was Delano there this morning?"

As if frankly, I said that Delano was worried over his young friend's love for a woman named Xandra; that somebody had written Delano saying the woman was not the sort a boy should care for and that he is in danger.

"Delano is afraid this Xandra may marry him."

"He needed to be," said Zoronna swiftly.

"Oh, I see, you're going to save him for yourself."

She regarded me with an expression half-contemptuous and largely murderous and disdained to answer; but turned her face away, and we rode along for three or four blocks. I was meditatively piecing together what she had said, and implied, with what I guessed at. Then she began speaking, a kind of impersonal bitterness in her tone—

"All my life I have wanted nothing, but to be happy——"

"Nonsense," I told her. "If you see a powder-barrel where a fuse is burning, you jump on to the barrel and start dancing."

She ignored what I said; but looking around, her eyes purplish as the haze that settles on distant mountains, watched me vaguely as if looking far away:

"I hate my life—I've always hated it! I dream of a quiet little garden, marigolds for a border, almond trees blooming over me, a lisping fountain where humming birds hover like tiny shadows in the spray! Oh, how I wish for that!"

"And some foolish youth to pay for it—with blood and gold!"

Instead of being angered she looked at me and with voice quiet as the imagined fountain, and asked:

"Why do you say such things of me? You do not believe them. You know that you do not. I know you do not believe them, but you make me furious, saying them. I don't know why Horrezko hates that boy. Horrezko never tells anything He says if he knows something no one else needs to know it. Horrezko——"

She said he was as enigmatic as he was grotesque. The ambiguities of his smile; his evasive, polished gestures—they might mean much or nothing; and his mocking graciousness, if it really was mocking—she could not be sure—gave him an impenetrable personality.

He had a sort of country place on Staten Island; he had taken an old mansion of a house and rebuilt it on the inside, freakishly. Accustomed as she was to the bizarre, and to such intricate novelties as entertainers and decorators devise to please people who can pay for them, Zoronna must have been a little dazzled by what she found. Her expressive gesture let me know that it would take too much time to try to describe all that; and her hurried words were:

"Elegant—and damnable. Oh, just like he is. Polished magnificence up-stairs, and a hell in the basement. It is there, too. And he, big, awkward—yet he moves as easily as a—a shadow; and there is a sort of uncouth grace about him. Every time I want to run from him and I want to stand and look at him. He is fascinating and—not repulsive so much as awful!

"He said to me: 'I have an enemy. I have waited for years and years, wondering how I could make my enemy suffer; for I have no mercy.'

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"Of course those aren't just his words. He has a curious way of putting things, and I am telling you what he said, only I can't repeat just how he did say it.

"And he said: 'Of course I could catch this enemy of mine, and pick the flesh off his bones, but that wouldn't hurt him much. His must be a terrible punishment——'

"I simply can't make you see how he said it, the way he looked, half as if joking, and yet with something sinister, almost terrifying in his voice. He said—I won't try to tell you what he said, but what he meant was that the man he hated—well, he made me understand that I was to ruin him. He saw refusal on my face before it got to my lips, and—the devil!—he said, 'Ah, then it must be hot pincers to flay my enemy—alive!'

"And he made me believe that he meant it. I don't know—I am not sure but that he did mean it. Anyway, I had to make a fearful choice. I suppose it was like those that Horrezko catches, terrifies, nearly kills—rich fools and worse. He picks on rich men for just the same reason that nobody cares to kill a lean hungry sheep.

"I asked what the man had done—this enemy. He laughed a little in such a strange way that I was uneasy.

" 'He has,' Horrezko said, 'mortally offended me in his choice of a father!' I cried, 'What do you mean?'

"He said, 'Just that!'

"He never tells anything.

"Oh, well, don't you see—no, you can't see, for you don't know Horrezko—how fearfully convincing he is? He made me feel that I would be the cause of having the man dreadfully tortured—if ever you saw Horrezko's place—it is decorated like a hell—it *is* a hell, that basement—you would understand why I felt that way.

"So I did meet Claude Genlis, and I found a mere sweet dear boy, just as honorable and innocent as a boy could be, and I wouldn't have let any harm happen to him for worlds! He didn't have the slightest idea that there was a creature on earth like Horrezko. It was his terrible danger that made me pity him—and—he loved me just as if he had never seen a woman before!

"I always do something foolish. All my life—just that way. I told Horrezko he was just a boy—Horrezko admitted he had never seen Claude! And I shouldn't have done it! It made him know I liked the boy. That horrid, misshapen terrible creature—he began to suspect me right there.

"He has a secretary, a fellow named Julander; and Julander somehow made himself my friend. Julander is just as bad as his master, only in another way—he is an unspeakable wretch. Do anything for money. He told me to have Claude leave the country, but the boy wouldn't go—without me. The idea of me going off with that child! It would have been death for us both anyway to have tried it. But I told Horrezko Claude had gone to Europe, and Julander—I paid him well for it—said it was true, said the men he had sent to investigate reported that the boy had gone.

"Julander then insisted that the boy must really be got out of the country at once or we both would get into trouble—Julander and me. I was helpless—then you showed up and made things worse. 'Appeal to Henri Delano,' Julander said to me, but he didn't say why. 'Just hint at the truth—it will be enough,' he told me; 'but whatever you do, don't mention names. So I wrote a letter to Mr. Delano."

Zoronna stopped, peering from the window at the swarming sidewalks. She stopped as if she was done with what she had to say, and had looked out to see where we were, how near we were to where we were going.

"How," I asked, "did you happen to meet Zitka?"

"Who?"

She looked around at me blankly.

"A queer fellow that Delano has for a friend—or an enemy—I'm not quite sure which. He is the one who told you *when* to send the letter."

"No one told me when to send that letter. I tumbled about in bed all one night, thinking about it and what to say; and at last I got up and dashed off the plain blunt truth, and sent it—first thing in the morning."

"When?"

"First thing in the morning—about seven o'clock. Why?"

"Are you sure?"

"Sure? Of course I am sure. Don't you suppose I would know?"

"Certainly," I agreed.

"Then why this mysterious insistence?"

There was no need to answer her; so I didn't. Evidently the letter had been delivered, received, opened, read and resealed by Zitka, who then, for the greater display of his prophetic powers, made

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arrangements to have it delivered again—shortly after midnight. Such are the advantages of being a fortune-teller.

For a moment or two Zoronna watched me as if expecting that I would explain; but I said nothing, and she looked away, busy with her own thoughts. Presently she said:

"We are almost there—" Then, "How do you feel toward Claude, *now?*"

And that underscored word was illuminating. I knew then what had puzzled me in her almost friendly narrative. She had wanted to explain, to make me sympathetic—not toward herself, but toward him. She had not known how little need there was for the effort. " I told her, truthfully enough but deceptively also, that I now had no reason for feeling any differently toward him. I did so because he is a very unlucky man who lets a woman think that he can be touched by a sad story. Why, in no time at all she would have him washing his eyes away, clear away, so that he would be blind as Samson after Delilah and her friends had finished with him.

## CHAPTER XV

*Woman—a woman can fool you, even when you don't believe her.*

MINE has been a very complete failure if I have not made it plain that I trusted Zoronna about as much as a wise man ever trusts a woman; and there is no knowing what to believe when a woman, as women have a way of doing, says that a thing is true then swears that it isn't. I was past expecting to find Calversley in her rooms; but the possibility existed, and where a possibility exists, probability always lurks just around the corner.

When Zoronna had thought it to her advantage to make me think Calversley had come to her, she vowed that he was in her hands; and when she saw that his presence was a menace to her, she even more passionately vowed that he had not been near.

Nor could I tell what to think from her evident uneasiness as we approached the door of her apartment. She was not at all the sort of person that has uneasiness, or having it, lets it be seen. She opened the door and stepped in ahead of me, hurriedly looking about; then stopped, startled as if she sensed rather than saw that something was wrong. The pause was momentary; then she flew at the open door leading into another room; and the room held an empty divan that had been opened for a bed, with comforters thrown about and on to the floor.

"Oh—they—they've got him!"

"Who—Genlis?"

Choking, desperate, her voice like a runner's out of breath:

"No—Calversley! They'll kill him! They'll kill him!"

"Him?—Why?"

"Because they found him here! Horrezko has never seen Claude. He'll believe Bob is Claude!"

"But those fellows who caught him last night—they know."

For a flickering second she hesitated, then:

"But I told you—didn't I?—then fled. Horrezko was that crazy. He blamed them. Julander told me over the phone."

"How do you know Calversley has been carried away? Maybe something just alarmed him and he ducked."

"No—see—there! There has been a fight—the way everything is torn up."

It looked as if there had been some slight mix-up, a little struggle of some kind.

"I don't see how they did it," I said. "Calversley was surely armed—and by now he ought to be over that squeamishness about shooting to kill!"

"They caught him asleep. Even if Horrezko found out he wasn't Claude—he would think him my friend, and they will torture him. Oh, you don't know what hideous—you must do something!"

She threw her hands to her head and turned away.

"Then," I said, "there is nothing left to do but to get Horrezko and——"

But that was as far as I got; and it came near to being the last thing that I ever did say. I had instinctively ducked as I looked around; and the black-jack meant for the top of my head fell glancingly on to my shoulder; and as I stepped back, reaching for a gun, the fellow threw wide the closet door and lunged, striking so hard against me that I slipped and would have gone down, but I snatched at him, holding myself up and grappling at the same time. And you can't very well draw a gun, or use it if you do draw it, when a heavier man than yourself is furiously trying to break your neck.

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I do not like hand-to-hand fights. The bigger brute has all the advantage; and I am as sensitive as a cat to water about even being touched. I do not like it. I don't want any man's hands on me.

This was a heavy-set fellow with a rough-and-tumble manner. He lost his head completely when he saw the well-aimed billy blow miss; and he tried to smash me into unconsciousness, but I had no intentions of permitting anything of the kind. He had thought to lay me out in one swipe, then attend to Zoronna as if my presence had never been in his way.

I held on to him. It was a new experience to me, but as usual I kept a very clear idea of what I was doing and ought to do. My hands are far too precious to risk having their knuckles smashed against the cheek-bones of a roughneck; but not being so particular about my elbow, I planted it against his jaw, and though he was too heavy and strong to go down, he was jarred.

I tried to break away, but could not. The clinch held, and we fell, locked fast like two fighting dogs.

I never so wanted to kill a man in my life—the insulting helplessness of being squeezed, beat, strangled, by a big brute gave me a flushed sensation that I had never felt before. By nature I am rigidly cold, emotionless; in moments of peril I feel no agitation, and personal anger seldom touches me, even when face to face with some fellow that ought to have been shot long ago.

Always I had thought it nonsense to speak of a man seeing "red;" and I did not then see any red, but I understood how it was possible. I was as near to being blindly furious as it was possible for me to be and it was the sensation of almost complete helplessness that made me so—for never, never in my life had I felt so utterly helpless. I will not permit the feeling; there is always some way out—but here, as far as I was concerned, there was none. I, as rapid and accurate a marksman as lived, was helpless, being throttled and choked and crushed like a barroom loafer—I, from whom people instinctively kept their hands!

It was a painful, exasperating experience; but my head remained cool enough for me to know that my only hope was to keep a grip on his right arm, and not let him swing that villainous billy on to my head. I am strong, but no physical match at all in a rough-and-tumble for a brute built on bull-dog lines, and with much of that animal's nature in him. Though I now know the fight was brief, it seemed an almost endless strain.

I was under him and the weight was oppressive. He was perspiring and his clothes were full of tobacco stench; and his hot breath in my face was sickening. I felt the weakening cramp of fatigue creep into my hand, which was clinched like a steel trap's teeth on the sleeve of his right arm, which he jerked, jerked, jerked, with maddening persistence and force to break from my grasp.

My fingers seemed to become detached from my body—and were, in the sense that they were ceasing to respond to the nerves. Jerk—jerk—jerk! My fingers gave way as if they had been on a dead man's hand. His big arm swung free, and up. I saw the leathern club in the air, and I closed my eyes, nerves tense and muscles braced to take the blow—but the blow never came.

I heard something—a dull thick sound, muffled, vague, not at all loud; and I felt the sudden pressure of dead weight. The fellow had gone unconscious.

Instantly I writhed and squirmed out from under him, and, looking around and up, saw Zoronna, leaning forward, braced, watchful, intent, both hands around the slender neck of an eighteen-inch bronze vase, half-lifted to strike again if the fellow moved.

"Thanks," I said as I got up, trying to straighten myself out.

Zoronna looked up with a startled expression, as if brought out of a trance.

"He would have killed you," she said. "Horrezko sent him!"

The vase fell from her hands, thumping to the floor.

"I—*we* ought to have known," I told her, "that somebody would be here. It is you they want more than Calversley—or Genlis."

"Yes," she said, abstract of tone, but staring at me, "more than Bob Calversley."

"I don't know why you did it—after the way you've been talking and acting all morning—but I am deeply grateful," I said, trying not to be too serious and yet not wholly ironical.

"It was for Calversley—you must save him!" Zoronna said it in an inflectionless voice, emphatic but a monotone.

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"We have no time to lose—but what to do?" I asked.

"Horrezko sleeps all day. We have till night. I'll try to get in touch with Julander—we must, must, must get there!"

## CHAPTER XVI

*When in doubt, it is more dangerous to do nothing than to attack.*

SHORTLY after sundown, just as soon as it was so dark that inquisitive people would have to come close enough to run the risk of getting seen—and hurt—Zoronna, myself and a fellow named Bill Coutts, set out in an automobile for Horrezko's.

Coutts did not want to go, so he sat by me and kept quiet, and Zoronna drove. His head ached still, and there was a lump on it something of the size and shape of a full grown pear. His thick hair had saved his skull from being laid wide open.

Coutts was really a more intelligent fellow than he had appeared, and we had come to be pretty well acquainted by spending much of the day together. He was big, muscular, with the roughly molded, sort of half-finished face that men who trust more to their fists than to their wits usually have; but he had some humor and no sullenness.

When he found out what was to be required of him he said—

"You got about as much chanst o' getting away with that as a snowball has o' freezin' in ——."

He grinned as he said it, half good-natured. Coutts was one of those fellows who regard life pretty much as a rough-and-tumble game, full of ups and downs, mostly downs; and three hundred years ago the armies of Europe were full of Coutts—men who sold their swords to any captain who had a fight on his hands; and they fought like heroes for a handful of silver that was tossed away to inn-keepers, gamblers and girls. That may seem a too romantic and gilded comparison for Coutts, who was a figure of no importance in life nor of much distinction in this tale; but I always did like any fellow who would take a bump without a whine and lose without being sullen.

Zoronna had gone to telephone, and I was in the room when Coutts, coming from the depths of the unconscious, blinked, felt around over his head, stared at me and demanded, petulant but not without accents of wonder—

"What the —— did you hit me with?"

I said—

"Oh, a woman knocked you out."

"She did, hunh? Well, she must've shook the roof down on top o' me, then. From the way it feels. An' who in —— are you?"

I told him. He gave a long-drawn slow whistle, and looking around behind him toward the closet from which he had struck at me, said:

"If I'd know that, I'd stayed right there—an' kept the door locked. Say," he asked briskly, still trying to estimate the dimensions of the lump by the pressure of his fingers, "say, what's the joke, anyway? Yesterday she was all for having your head on a platter. An' now—" he tapped his lump—"she hands *me* that just when I'm beanin' you!"

"You can never tell what a woman will do—next," I assured him.

"You said it. You said all of it."

I asked if he would mind telling me just what his instructions were—just what he had been detailed to do in the room.

"Me? I ain't got secrets from nobody. Sure. After we grabbed off that fellow here—he tried to put up a fight——"

"What was his name?"

"I don't know who the —— he was. I never seen him before. He was asleep here. Well, I was left to nail the girl when she showed. That's all. I thought I saw a chance to put you into the clear, but me foot slipped and I sprained my nose. I'm out o' the game. That's all. Just whistle up the coppers an' I'll plead guilty to anything you say. Burgl'ry, 'sault an' batt'ry—anything."

"Luck is a great thing," I told him.

"Yeah. You said it. It is—but what in —— did she hit me with? I'm curious."

I pointed to the metal vase on the floor near him; and he turned, picked it up, weighed it in his hand, balanced it as a club, gave me a sidelong glance, caught my eye, and decided that there wasn't much chance of catching me off guard, so dropped it to the floor and took to a cigaret.

"You've been a sorta messin' things up for us the last couple o' days, haven't you? Yeah. You have."

The afternoon passed with Zoronna growing more and more troubled. She had been

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unable to get any response from Horrezko; and Julander's help was something she had very much counted on. So as night came on, there seemed nothing else to do and I decided that we would have to do what we could by way of using Mr. Coutts for a decoy, passport, or whatever it was that would be the most effective.

When the situation was explained to him he said:

"Hunh? Not me. No. I won't try nothin' like that." But he changed his mind, reluctantly; and he did try it.

As we came within a hundred yards of the grounds the auto was stopped and parked without lights a little off the road under a big tree that leaned from over a fence.

"Now Coutts," I said, explaining, "I think it will be best to pretend that you and I are bringing her in as a prisoner."

"An' what d'you think'll happen to me? Hunh?"

"I can imagine that Horrezko will be deeply grieved that you took even an unwilling part in helping us; but I am likely to be just as deeply grieved if you don't."

He understood. He said:

"Aw, ——. I guess I'm in Dutch," which shows how very well he did understand.

He knew that Horrezko would make his troubles many and painful—but there is the hope of evading anything that may be delayed; and there was no chance for delaying what I demanded. Zoronna knew the lay of the land, which was helpful; but if she had appeared otherwise than as a prisoner she would at once have been made one. All I wished, or hoped for, was to delay suspicion just the half-minute necessary to get into the house with the door shut behind us.

It was dark. I kept a hold on Coutts' arm and let him know that a gun's nose was so close to his side that a bullet would go through him if he made so much as a wiggle. We entered the grounds and had not gone more than a few feet when there was a noiseless rush of feet, and I felt shadows all about us.

"Dogs?"

"Yeah."

"Yes," said Zoronna. "Collies. They know Coutts and me."

"Yeah, they know us. Otherwise they'd make noise enough to wake a guy that's been dead ten year."

Getting into the house was almost too simple and easy to need relating. We went half-stumbling through the darkness, with silent dogs at our heels, around to some doorway that Zoronna approved of; and she knocked on the knocker in the way that Coutts had instructed. ("If anything goes wrong," I had told him, "of course I'll have to blame you—even if it isn't your fault." "I get'uah," he had answered dispiritedly.)

Presently the heavy door opened a half-inch; and a voice asked—

"Who is it?"

A gun's nose gently rubbed itself along Coutts' ribs and he made answer, saying—

"I got that woman."

"What woman?"

"Xandra."

"Holy gee!" said the voice from behind the door, opening the door wide; and Zoronna stepped through.

"Who's that?" demanded the fellow, eyeing me. I had glanced about. No one else was in sight.

"Put them up!" I said. "You too, Coutts."

It was no trouble at all. The man cursed Coutts, saying there was no need for him to pretend at being stuck up; and that Coutts would get his!

I had come amply prepared for the situation and handcuffed them together with their hands behind their backs; but to keep them from quarreling—or making other unnecessary noises—I tamped home a couple of gags. I did a workmanlike job of it, being very much occupied with what I was doing while I was doing it; and when I looked up, Zoronna was gone.

"Serves me right," I felt like saying to myself. "I ought've tied her up too—since she was to play the part of a prisoner. Made it realistic."

I looked about. I seemed to be in a side entrance hallway, narrow, unfurnished, but panneled with rich old wood, and the light brackets were of wrought iron. I scarcely had an idea which way to turn. There were doorways leading to the right and to the left. I turned left. No man ever gets near the Devil by going right.

I came out at the foot of a broad stairway that gave a slow serpentine turn as it coiled two stories up. I looked watchfully about, feeling that somehow I had got into a quiet well-ordered art gallery. There was an air of spaciousness, the rich dim



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luster of polished old wood, high panelings. The dark polished floor was overlaid with a few darkly brilliant rugs—like the beauty of tropic women.

With perhaps much the same manner of gawkiness as a plow-boy, I looked about, all about, suspicious, curious, even bending my throat to gaze at the small dome three stories up that fitted like a coil above the stairway. Paintings were on the walls, not clustered about, but placed as if each was worthy the distinction of isolation. I know nothing of art; but one so unenlightened as myself can sense when appreciation of values has attended to the arrangement rather than when mere pride of ownership has made the accumulation.

The place had the hushed atmosphere of a gallery—the sort of massive quietness that causes one instinctively to move quietly and speak softly. I looked around and around, wondering if I had been tricked or was to be tricked. Zoronna had vanished. It was, I reflected, possible that she had darted off to find Horrezko, to pour out some explanation, get forgiveness, demand vengeance. I could not imagine what had caused her to disappear—and then, a little belatedly, I began to wonder just what had made her come. If she had cared so little for Calversley as to let him go unpitied to prison for a crime of her own, just why would she have so much concern over his being held by Horrezko? And I said to myself:

"I'll bet a dollar it was Genlis they carried off, and she worked me into breaking in here and bringing her with me. She has an idea about where to find him and has gone to see if she can't slip him out of the house again. And leave me holding the sack. I'll bet two dollars that's what has happened."

If I had tried harder than I did I couldn't have imagined anything more plausible than that; but I did not greatly try, for imagining things is a sort of folly, not unlike drunkenness, and often lands one into fear-thoughts bad as delirium tremens.

I was in the house, a gun in either pocket; so that was enough. Whenever at last I do get into a situation where I can not take care of myself, then—well, I shall pay the price that every man must pay for blundering.

There must, I was sure, be servants about; but they didn't overrun the house, and in such a house they were sure to be soft-footed, well-mannered servants. If I met any of them we could talk together; and if not, I would go on as best I could.

There were several doors in sight, all closed; but I was attracted to one of great size; and I listened, with ear against it, then pushed it softly open and peered inside. A vague light was burning that showed me a large dining-room, more like a hall than a room, with high ceiling. A dining-room—with but one chair at the board, a great chair with the back bellied out. At one side, arranged on oaken shelves, dishes of polished silver glowed as if molded from fragments of a full moon. Indistinctly, I saw pictures on the wall. This was where Horrezko dined in solitary splendor. I almost felt sorry for him. Then I closed the door and stepped back.

There were other doors; but also there was the stairway—and I went up the stairs, warily looking behind me and above me as I moved, listening; but there was nothing but silence.

On the second floor I stepped off on to a circular hall like a balcony, as the coiling stairs went on. No hallway led in any direction; but again there were doors. I passed from one to another, listening; and the austere portraits of stern medieval men looked down as if watchfully.

Then I tried one of the broad doors, and it was unlocked. I opened it slightly and looked into a room walled with books—a large room with dim burning lights. Zoronna had said something about his being always with books, and I searched for the outline of some man's form, and was just closing the door to pass to another when I heard a voice, far away, coming as if from a distance.

I STEPPED into the library, shutting the door gently, and moved forward, listening, carefully on tip-toes. I could hear only sounds, not words; and the sound was a human voice, but strangely unlike any that I had ever heard. This voice had a modulated, inflectional rise and fall like, or something like, the sweep and rise and drop of a violin; and yet, somehow, was not musical, not metallic, and not human. Unangered, forceful, sardonic, the voice flowed on; and as I went stealthily across the long room, I discovered that it came from a curtained alcove; and on noiseless toes I came close.

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"— born with all the desires of genius, the lust for beauty, cursed before birth to be a devil, and brought into the world misshapen as a toad, consecrated at the black rock altar by the blood of a living victim to be a curse to people yet unknown and yet unborn. That is who I am—what I am—damned and unforgivable—but as essential to God's justice as my father, Sathanas!"

And he laughed, quietly, softly—sardonic, not amused. I had edged to the doorway and peered through with one eye. I knew what to expect, or thought I did; but no imagination of mine could have prepared me for what I saw.

In a massive chair, at least three feet wide with a back that rose like a throne, sat Horrezko. The back of the chair, covered with velvet imperially red, was curved to fit his misshapen body. He sat with arm carelessly extended along the arm of the chair, and the other hand, long, big and shapely, with the delicate sensitiveness of an artist's hand, toyed with a long, heavy white stick—an ivory cane with, a knob of black.

Before him, motionless, in a deep oaken chair, carved intricately, covered with tapestry, was Henri Delano—a gambler still, facing the sardonic winner of the game with the composure of age, wearily. His gray eyes were watchful, but tired. His face, in spite of the weariness, was still a mask.

They were alone.

"You have seen my books, you have seen my pictures, you have seen the jeweled bindings, and my miniatures, my tapestries, and the soft living lines of my vases and urns, the burning colors of rare glass—and that I—I—should love beauty has made you smile behind your beard!"

In the pause I saw rather than heard his unangered ironical laughter, knowing by the curl of his broad lips that it was laughter. An emperor's conscious power, the dignity of one imperious, sat on that strange man who made me think of one of the earth's early creatures, born when the sons of gods forcibly wooed the daughters of men. His was the body of a broken giant, of one that had been cut to pieces and, with legs shortened, arms twisted, shoulders askew, thrown together again by a drunken wizard —as Zoronna had said. The great head had a satanic nobleness; and I remembered vividly that Satan was an archangel—bruised, broken, crushed, misshapen by the long fall from Heaven.

"And I have to hide myself from the eyes of men. Children would gape in fright and women shudder. But do you think a grotesque ugly body is an armor plate, and keeps away wounds to pride? Would you walk the streets if you were hideously crippled, and go about your ways unconcerned? Just so with me."

There was no laughter now, but a proud tilt to the big head, and the face, which seemed in a way the background, the setting, the frame, for the blazing, black eyes —such eyes as Deldohara herself must have had—looked down upon Delano; and the look was without anger, unchallenging, imperturbable, enigmatic.

Horrezko's face was such as a sculptor might have chosen for a statue of Lucifer himself, intelligent, sensitive, refined, yet Satanic; bold, strong, poised, swift in expression, with flutterings of ironic humor about the lips, and the sharp edge of terrible cruelty on each of the features.

"And all these years you have thought that I came out into the world to waste myself in working a miserable revenge on persons I could break like—that!"

Unexpectedly as a flash he snapped the ivory stick between his long strong hands and idly dropped the pieces to the floor in front of him.

"No!" His voice swung the words out with slow force. "No! But it was not mercy! It is contempt! Niss—you know of him? He was a man of power. I broke him. The list is a long one. A home like this, books such as these, pictures that I want, the priceless arts of the world—such things are not given to the people who love them. They are given to the people who can buy them! As my mother's prayers made me a devil, have I not the holy right to seize on the evil men of the earth? For what other use is hell, to which God Himself discards the sinners?"

Horrezko's lips curled, amused by his own blasphemy. He was sardonic, taunting, mad.

"It pleases me to play the Devil"

And I knew that it was so.

"I have taken money only from those who have lost their souls—" his voice was mocking—"and in my basement is everything that hell has, or at most needs. You shall see!"

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There was an inflectional menace in the promise, so faint as to seem unintentional but too subtly expressed to have been an accident.

"And you this night have offered your wealth to me—money to me who has but to reach my hand—" a long hand went out and wavered gropingly in the air— "and take what I want from any man that lives! At times I slide into his room, noiseless as a dream, and make him believe he is dead and damned; for—" bitterly ironical, with fingers turned in a gesture upon himself, pointing at his deformity— "if one is a devil one must be a Devil. You think I exaggerate? You shall see!"

No mistaking the menace now. It was gleeful though, cruel too, but almost childishly triumphant.

"I called you here this day, and you came—unafraid, you said. Heroic man, to call yourself unafraid when you came trembling and are still breathless! At twelve years—much I knew of oaths and vengeance then!—I swore never to hurt your body with blows or wounds. That was so you could live longer and suffer more. And swore never to touch a coin of your money. That was so your wealth would not be a bribe to me. You might have forgotten me but for that doubly damned Zitka; and with him you have tortured yourself and punished yourself all these years. And I might have forgotten you, but for the prowlers he hired—you knew of that, did you?—to crawl and sniff about, searching me out; and such of them as I did not take the trouble to buy, I killed!"

And Horrezko laughed, mockingly, his cruelty aglow.

"There was no forgetting that some day I should strike you and yours as long as Zitka's meddlesomeness reminded me of my child-made oath! It were better for you to have had him for an enemy than a friend.

"I sent a woman to make a fool of that other son of yours—the one you love. A woman I had heaped with kindness, and her gratitude was pity for the fool—pity? Love! She dies for it! And her pity awoke me, aroused me to my oath. And now that I've got him, got him out of that woman's room where he hid like a frightened rabbit I—" Horrezko paused, holding the torture of delayed judgment dramatically; then— "but I am going to be moved by your prayers, and let him live. But I'll warp his body, twist it, break it, make him so askew and awry that all the world will know him for my brother!"

Delano groaned. His head dropped forward into his hands. His body quivered and he was noiselessly sobbing. The mask had been torn away, and he showed a father's naked face. Horrezko's black eyes gleamed, and he drew himself up inches higher, staring, glaring down, amused, half-gleeful, wholly cruel.

Then with the very unpleasant sensation of having been thoroughly tricked, I realized what had happened; and though I had glimmeringly suspected it, the cold knowledge was exasperating. I should have been more suspicious. Looking back I saw just where and how she had fooled me; but chiefly it was by her unexpected help in knocking Coutts over the head. And the joke of it—if there could be anything like a joke in such a tragic affair—was that I would anyway have done what I could to pull Genlis out from Horrezko's claws; for I liked the boy and Delano was my friend. So, after all, it didn't matter; except there was disappointment that Calversley was not to be helped by what I did.

Horrezko went on:

"He is in my Hell; and you shall see me break every bone in his body—every bone that can be broken without letting his precious life slip away. Then when he looks enough like me to be my brother, I'll give him back to you; and we shall see if women love his beauty, and lie for him, dare my anger for him—die for him as she must and shall!"

Some one burst rushing through the door; and I dropped down, not sure but that I had been seen, or would be seen; but the fellow was highly excited and saw nothing. He raced as if running from a fearful thing, and plunged passed me and into the alcove with the cry:

"Julander's gone—been gone for hours! I found he'd escaped when we caught the woman——"

He got no further. Horrezko had not heard, not listened to even that much. Like some huge ape, with powerful swiftness, Horrezko had leaped from the chair, striking the man furiously then caught his reeling body, and, with unimagined strength raising it above his own head flung the shrieking fellow crushing to the floor.

"Let that wretch escape, did you?"

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Horrezko shouted at the unconscious body, crumpled at his feet.

Then as if the words gave the signal, were the cue, a second fellow burst into the room. He saw me, but saw nothing suspicious in my being there—probably felt I would not have been there without Horrezko's knowledge; and besides, he brought news that left no room in his head for lesser fears. I knew it by the intense rigid stare in his eyes as he came running.

"Julander an' Xandra have brought the police!" he shouted. "They're breaking in!"

Horrezko whirled. He cried:

"Then kill that boy! Police—who let that —— Julander get away? Who?"

A hand reached out, hovering menacingly, and the fellow shrank back a little, as if perfectly aware of the dangers from that python-like grasp. He answered hurriedly:

"We do not know—we did not know he was gone till we caught Xandra trying to open the door."

"You have her! Fool, idiot—son of two idiots! You have been long in saying so! The police—she brought them! She and Julander, fathered by a snake! Lost—all lost, everything lost but vengeance. The bargain is fair!"

"But the police are here!"

"Aye, to find my foot-prints when I have gone! There is time. My doors are heavy. Come—" his hand went toward Delano. "You shall see me beat your son to death!"

With that he raised, half-dragging, half-lifting, Delano from the chair; and Delano rose tottering, his face distorted with pain. His hands groped flutteringly at his breast, and he reeled back, pale and a dead weight.

"His heart," said Horrezko with something between a chuckle and a sneer in his voice; then the powerful creature raised Delano's body easily as if lifting a child and, not tenderly but not roughly, dropped it on to the padded red throne-chair.

"There'll be laughter in Deldohara's grave this night," said Horrezko, as if thinking aloud; and squirming himself around he caught at the servant's arm, with:

"Claude Genlis has brought all this on me, and now I lose everything because I let him live so long. I'll kill him and free me of my curse this night!"

"Not this night!" I said sharply, two guns in sight, halting him as if with a jerk as he shambled swiftly from the alcove; and halting the servant too, who stopped with his mouth wide open as a fish trap.

Herrozko growled, and it was as animal a sound as ever I heard from a human throat, as he questioned—

"Police?"

"No. Not police."

"Who?"

The voice had changed. It was not a growl, but still unhuman though half-pleasant.

"Everhard!"

HE WAS an ugly thing, that Horrezko, but somehow fascinating; and his face was expressive as language. Even the face was a little grotesque, though not at all deformed; and at my name he smiled as one smiles in gracious recognition. Almost, I thought, he was about to put out his hand to me. I said—

"You seem amused."

"No—" he spoke easily— "pleased."

"Why pleased?"

"For one thing," his thick lips moved rapidly, and the black eyes seemed on fire, "we hate the same woman."

That was a poor basis for acquaintanceship, and I resented the intimacy implied; more than that I resented the something intangibly sardonic about his voice. And he was, so it seemed to me, mockingly calm in adding:

"When there is more leisure I shall be glad to have you tell how you happen to be in my house, where, though unbidden, you are welcome!"

He bowed, almost convincing.

"Unbidden?" I demanded. "Was it not last night your servants came to bring me—even against my wish?"

"But we are friends."

"I do not usually need to be told who are my friends. I know them."

He answered—

"And if I can show you that we have worked toward the same ends?"

"I am not good at riddles."

"I would be more of a host—but your reputation does not allow me to be wholly at ease—as much at ease as a host should be—with that gun pointed at my head."

"I am not tempted to put you at ease. Delano was my friend; and Genlis, too."

"Your friend!"

The eyes flashed as if powder had touched fire within them. The thick lips quivered

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backward from the teeth, and I could sense the strain of his muscles in the longing to break my neck. I had seen him move, seen the swiftness with which his powerful, awkward, distorted body could lunge; I knew his impatience to be gone from the room—his desperate need to be gone from the house.

There was a far off cry that came up from somewhere in the depths of that great house. It reached us like the first shout of battle; then there sounded the thud of pounding, muffled by distance, mingled with the yelp and sharp cry of dogs; then struck the sharp rattling throb of guns, and suddenly, quiet—broken at once by the dogs that raged, increasing frantic.

I had turned an ear to listen, but kept my eyes on Horrezko, with the edge of my gaze on the dummy-like servant.

Horrezko was close to me, five or six feet away—so near that at the first incautious turning of my head he could have bounded forward, those long powerful hands at my throat. Then I saw his great black eyes go past my face with the intent gaze of one seeing the unexpected. My impulse was to turn and look too; but I was not to be caught by that trick—then—

"Drop those guns!" burst behind me.

I had about a half-second in which to think, and the rest of that same second in which to act; but that was more than I needed. I fell, hand and knee to the floor, turning as I dropped and shooting as I turned. A bullet went over me. I had no time to look, no time to see the man who stood near the open door; but I fired at the outline of him, knowing even as I shot that I had hit, though he too had dropped, ducking down, as quick of wit as myself.

I had had no time to look at the man for I dreaded Horrezko's leap at me; and jerked my head and gun around. Then and there he would have died but that he sprang, not at me, but away as if running; and a second bullet, stirring up splinters right under my belly, jerked my attention around toward the man with the gun—and on that instant the lights in the room went out. There was blackness, except for the spurt of the gun as it struck at me, and the answering roar of mine. Horrezko had put out the lights. The dummy-like servant had broken into moans, and for a moment or two I thought he must have been hit, then knew it was nothing but fright, for we had been shooting too straight for accidents.

Except for whimpering shivers from the servant, quiet settled on the room. That other fellow knew the use of a gun too well to make mistakes. I could tell that. He was dangerous. He was keeping quiet, perhaps noiselessly moving nearer. I edged off, and waited. I thought once or twice that I heard movement, but it was too vague, too indistinct as to location to risk a shot; besides, in firing I would reveal my own whereabouts. So we waited. Then, as I had two guns, I thought I might as well play the trick draw fire and answer it. I held my left hand as far off to the side as I could reach, and pulled the trigger. Instantly, and from much nearer than I had expected, the other fellow shot; and while I am not at all sensitive about feeling the breath of passing bullets, that one nipped a hair or two off my wrist and stung the skin!

*Bang—bang—bang!* I answered from the right hand gun.

*Bang—bang—bang!* came the answer. The fellow was shooting it out with me, unhesitatingly, and luck kept me alive, but I could not imagine what protected him, for luck seldom serves a man at whom I have shot, never if I shoot at him three or four times.

The door opened—it drew our eyes as a flag of truce. The dim light in the hall blocked out the doorway, and I saw the clumsy silhouette of Horrezko pass swiftly through. The door slammed closed; and I heard the rattle for a lock. That was not so strange—just cowardly it seemed, to sneak away and lock up his champion to fight it out unaided; but through the heavy doorway there came loud, high mocking laughter. He meant that we should hear. Into the darkness I spoke:

"The joke seems to be on us, old man."

"Who—say—who—that voice—who are *you!*"

And something like a shiver, or a shudder, a thrill of some kind—I never have shudders and shivers—went through me, for I knew that voice, or one like it; and I cried back—

"Who is that—you—can't be——"

He shouted at me—

"Don!"

"Calversley!"

And Calversley began to swear with a sort of ecstatic fluency. No wonder Horrezko had laughed.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

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I was moving toward his voice in the darkness, and demanded the same thing of him.

"Here—this way, Don!"

I touched a hand.

"Don, old man. It's good to feel this hand. You'll have to stoop a bit, though—you just can't miss, can you?"

"You're hit!"

"Twice anyway," he said cheerfully. "Low average for you, Don. You got me some place around the knee, and I can't stand. The other one is up around the shoulder—took the shoulder the first shot. Neither serious— God, how good to feel your hand!"

"Lights—turn on those lights!" I shouted at the servant. "You—hear me?"

The lights, after some fumbling, came on; and it was Calversley—the same slender, neat, boyish, high-spirited Calversley, blue of eye, quick of brain, and unflinchingly audacious.

"Why did you help that devil?" I demanded, angered, heart-sick, looking at the blood on him and kneeling with my hands, fumbling at his broken leg.

"He lifted me out of San Quentin—worked the transfer to Folsom—pulled wires some way—had a state-room for me on the same train—I never jumped from it—made the state-room—changed clothes and went to bed. He arranged everything fine. Had it easy clear across the country. Been resting here two days—never dreamed you were in New York! Heard a racket below a while ago and—here we are. It's your turn—what's the row?"

There was precious little time, and none of it to waste. I said:

"Tale's too long; Horrezko's only an incident. But even if I have just missed killing you, I've got news that'll help a lot. I knew you were innocent—and Zoronna's confessed!"

"Confessed! To what?"

"To clear you, of course!"

"Don, you're crazy."

"No I have the confession—here—read."

I gave him the paper. He read at a glance, then reread slowly, asking as his eyes went over it—

"Sounds like you—wrote this for her, didn't you?"

"I helped her with it."

He tore the signature off, then tore the paper in two and across, scattering the pieces.

"Old man, I know you; but she didn't do it."

"You killed him—and were caught so easily? I don't believe it!"

"Don't. That's the joke——"

"Joke!"

Rapidly he explained, talking at top speed.

"I thought she did it, and—well, I wasn't going to tell the police so. I told her to stay out of my sight, not come within a hundred miles of me—sent a message that made her furious—she'll never forgive me. Don't you see? I had to do something to keep her from visiting me, and getting suspicious, and maybe finding out the truth——"

"You're a chivalrous idiot."

"Chivalrous, nothing. You wouldn't let a woman go to prison, would you?"

"Wouldn't I? I would drag her there by the hair. Then she did kill him!"

"No. I just thought she did. She ought to have! I sent a message that made her mad, and she stayed away. I'll tell her all about it some time."

"She was glad to stay away—glad to have an excuse. If she had been innocent possibly she might have been hurt—but——"

"That's just what she was—innocent. Innocent as an unborn babe. I was caught in—well, it was Luck. No frame-up. Nothing. Circumstantial evidence walloped me. Horrezko's gunman waited that night just outside the door until Zoronna left, then he opened the door and plugged him—he had been talking too much, getting drunk and bragging. That's why Horrezko helped me out. He knew I was innocent—and he—well, I guess he wanted to use me, too. Funny, isn't it, the way we've bumped into each other tonight? Lord, I wish I'd shot that devil!"

I knew that I had to get out of the room, someway get down into the basement. Perhaps already I had waited until something tragic had been done.

I found the servant, some sort of a foreigner, Greek, Albanian or something, bending over Delano.

"Isn't he dead?"

"No, sir," said the fellow, standing up quickly. "He is—he seems to be asking for water."

I went to the library door. It was a heavy thick oaken door. I fired into the lock, but it did not give way. If I had had

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a pocket full of shells I might have splintered a way through the lock; but I hardly dared to use up my clips. I looked about for something to pound with. There was nothing. Books do not make clubs. I went to the servant, who still stood by Delano, looking down helplessly at him.

"Here—give me a hand on this chair. We'll put him in the other one."

We lifted Delano into another chair. He was alive, not quite unconscious, but too dazed and weak to know—or perhaps to care.

Then the fellow and I carried and dragged the heavy throne chair clear across the big room to the oaken door.

"All right. Hold it up—this way—a little from the floor—and swing it— Now! That's it—swing—back—again——"

And so we battered with our improvised catapult that would have smashed in the side of a house; and with ten or twelve blows the door began to crack, shiver and gave way.

"Come," I said, taking him by the arm, "show me how to get down into the—what is it? Dungeon—basement—what?"

He drew back. I had seen enough to know that he was a coward.

"No," he said, "I am afraid. It is terrible!"

I pointed a gun at him.

"Show me the way!"

"Surely, sir. Yes!" he cried, and led the way down stairs.

Then he opened a door and pointed.

"This is the way."

I peered over his shoulder into darkness that seemed as black and impenetrable as the bottomless pit.

"What is here? Stairs?"

"Stairs," he said.

He stepped aside, and I came close, looking down, feeling cautiously with my toe—and he gave me a shove and shut the door. That is the way it happens—if a fellow isn't tensely on guard every moment, something unexpected hits him; and I was slightly off guard then only because the fellow had seemed such a lumpish coward that anything like daring was the last thing to be expected from him. Anyway I was not much off guard—being ready to shoot; and I did.

Right through the door I sent a tandem of bullets, and I was encouraged to believe that they got him, for he yelled—and kept on yelling; but the rascal had thrown the latch on the door so that I could not open it—at least not without the trouble of breaking it down. The library door had undoubtedly put the idea into his head, but he probably wouldn't think it such a fine idea after he had paid the surgical bill for having a couple of pieces of lead cut out of him.

Anyway, there I was, at the head of a stairway dark as a black man's throat; and I didn't know what lay below, but I edged my way down, step by step; and it was a very steep stairs, which made it a little more unpleasant in the dark.

I am willing to believe that there were more hocus-pocus and novelty stunts around Horrezko's hell than those of us who are said to be going there will find in the real one; but as his purpose was to make some of his victims actually wonder, if not believe, they were going through the real thing, he needed more hocus-pocus. The imitation must always exaggerate to be convincing.

At last I came to the foot of the stairs; and I reached out cautiously in all directions, for I didn't know whether there was a hole in the ground or a passageway leading off in some direction—or—well, I had no idea what there was; and on three sides I found nothing but what appeared to be solid walls; and as this seemed to be an unreasonable arrangement I felt about and pried about, but there was nothing but smooth walls—excepting a slight crack, running vertically; and just because there was nothing else to do then, for any idea I had, I pushed against the wall, and it slowly moved, swinging wide, opening at the crack. A slit of light appeared in the solid blackness, and I heard the most deafening din that was ever made outside of a madhouse. There was screeching and groaning, creaking, flopping, snapping, shrill cries and clattering rattles; there was every dissonance under heaven, none really piercingly loud, but every one insistent.

My eyes, used to the darkness, were dazzled by the glare of light; and at first I got only a blurred impression of vague monstrous and queer shapes; and the light, when I did get used to it, gave an unfamiliar, unearthly, ghastly hue to everything and everybody.

Across from me, against a black stone wall, a pit of fire was burning with leaping flames that swung to and fro with almost

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rhythmic movement; and the heat of the place was like a blast from a dragon's breath.

AS I stepped through the doorway on to a sort of narrow platform, a great bat-like creature swooped at me—and passed on. It was a mechanical device, not a live thing; but very realistic, very. I knew it was not alive for I struck at it, hit it, overturned it, so that it went on, overturned, drawn as well by its wire that way as if upright.

I could well believe that any man brought into the place but half-awake and wholly sick from chloroform or dope would be half-crazed with fear. It was dizzying, rather than anything else—with so much movement, such queer objects bobbing and darting, the discordance of so many sounds, and the light that gave to every object a color, some sort of ghastly bluish-green, which seem to affect my stomach.

"What stupid madness!" I thought to myself, half-angered by the unpleasantness of it and entirely unimpressed—except a little perhaps by the brilliant flames leaping at the wall across from me; but even they were a little discolored, unnatural, in that artfully ghastly light.

Madness there was, and stupidity too. I had come out on to a small ledge some four or five feet above the floor. The ledge curved out of sight on either side in a sharp semicircle. From this shelf-like elevation I overlooked the large basement room, with its stifling Coney Island hell, and no one seemed to have noticed my coming. The group near the center of the room were bending forward, with Horrezko gesticulating commands, and Zoronna, her hands held behind her by a fellow who peered over her shoulder at what was going on, leaned peeringly, bending half to the floor.

Then Horrezko stepped back; the two men who had been working under his direction straightened up, moving back a little; and I saw a body stretched out on some sort of wooden frame. I knew rather than saw that it was Claude Genlis.

Suddenly the place became almost quiet. Evidently at the turn of a switch all that croaking, grunting, shrieking, flopping and squeaking had stopped; and it had the ominous calm of a pause in midstorm. I guessed that, when Horrezko had time for playing his hell-game more artistically, he obtained some quite dramatic effect in the eyes of the frightened, half-doped victims, by commanding silence—and getting it; and these servants of his, as well as himself, were no doubt decked out in stagey dress that was in keeping with the rest of papier-mâché horrors; all papier-mâché horror excepting the heart of that devil himself; and *it* was satanic. Horrezko spoke, facing Zoronna:

"When *you* needed help, I gave it—and what did I demand? Merely that you should teach folly to a fool. And you lied to me—you and Julander. I meant to burn him alive this night; but he is gone and the police are here. I lose my home, my treasures, all the work of years, everything—all because of you!

"My back is crooked, my shoulders are twisted, my legs are gnarled, but I have scholarship, luxury, power—and you threw it all away on this—this—this——"

Horrezko's hand gestured like a dagger thrust toward the bound boy. And suddenly I realized that a great part of Horrezko's madness was jealousy. Zoronna, the flame-woman, had set him on fire!

"But," cried Horrezko, "though I lose everything—*you* gain nothing!"

"The police are here!" Zoronna shouted, hoping, I believe, to frighten him, to make him feel that he had no time for anything but escape.

"Aye, here—waiting for reenforcements to break through my doors—that you tried to unlock for them! And now before you die you will see your lover as crooked and warped as I, Horrezko!"

Zoronna struggled soundlessly, writhing; but the man who held her hands behind her was strong, and she did not break away.

"Break him!" Horrezko shouted, his long arm toward the boy.

The two men who had bound the boy took a step back and one of them swung a club to his shoulder, ready to bring it down. I shot. I shot at the man with the club on the farthest side of the boy, and the fellow crumpled forward, dropping as a steer goes down when the hammer swings on its skull. The roar of the gun was like a peal of thunder, and seemed in that queer place to catch a dozen echoes, throwing them about, reverberating for a second or two from wall to wall.

"Cut him loose!" I said.

Then, maybe by accident, but I believe

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it was done either to drown what I might say or to distract my attention, all hell broke lose again. I use that trite phrase with dispassionate literalness. Horrezko touched—either inadvertently or more likely with full intention—the secret button, switch, or whatever it was that controlled the pandemonium, and, as if awakened by the report of my gun, the groaning and shrieking, the squeaking, creaking, rattling, flopping, began and continued. They had heard me, and tensely watchful I stood for a moment, waiting. People usually do what I say—always when I have a gun in a hand.

Death has snatched out at me a time or two in my life, but so far I have succeeded in ducking from the grasp of the bony fingers; and I don't think I ever ducked any faster or with less dignity than I did right then, for from somewhere, on the instant, as if indeed summoned by fiendish magic, a figure swept at me from around the curve of the ledge with a glittering, rippling *kris* four feet long; and in the nick of the last second before it would have cut me in two, I caught the gleam of the steel. I went off that ledge, jumping backward, shooting as I went, shooting while I was in the air, shooting as I hit the floor, half-falling—and the man who had leaped after me, coming on with the bold fury of a fanged animal, fell lifeless, the wavering ribbon of double-edged steel clattering perilously close to me as it left his fingers.

I rolled over, gun extended, for I had expected a rush from Horrezko or one of his men; and for a moment I couldn't see anybody for the muddle of entwining bodies. Zoronna had broken lose, and with a knife snatched from her bosom, leaped for Horrezko's back; but the man from whom she had jerked loose caught at the hand, and the second fellow had also leaped at her, tearing at her arm.

There is no way of conveying the intensity of a second's activity, for moments of dramatic stress, passing swift as thought, leave impressions that take many words to describe and a life-time to forget. In the very glance that took in the struggle that almost instantly was ended by Zoronna's being overpowered, and the knife falling to the floor, I saw the solid black stone wall, that was licked by the wavering flames of the pit, move. As I looked a rock—or so it seemed—was pushed out and swung open; and there appeared out of the black hole a queer shape that grew into the form of Zitka, death's-head on short neck, joined to the broad thick chest.

This seemed too, too much, and I stared like any moon-struck fool; but this was not all. He glanced down into the flames that burned like tongues of huge serpents. He glanced, I say, and did not hesitate; but, emerging, jumped across the seething fire tongues—leaped right through the flame and out upon the floor.

Above that din, above the screeching and creaking, his harsh voice rose as the shriek of a siren rises. In his own den, hedged about by his own walls, surrounded by bars and locks that let him have leisure while even the police were at his doors Horrezko heard the implacable challenge of his ancient people among the Asian mountains; and with whirl-pool wrath, he turned.

He saw Zitka, knew him, saw how he had come out of what appeared to be solid masonry and waded through the fire. There was an ancient feud between their families; and for a moment they spoke, one at the other, in sharp hard phrases, undoubtedly words of insult, then rushed together with eager fury.

Behind them flames splashed up from the pit with lurid glare, and the unearthly discoloration of the light in that place of contrived horror and grotesque shapes made the scene unreal as a dream, as frightful as a nightmare. They fought for death—two wizards and sons of wizards, locked crushingly tight, swaying, rocking.

One of Horrezko's servants jumped forward to aid his master, and as I jumped at him, shoving him back, the other struck at me—and went down, shot through the heart. The other fellow, suddenly remembering that a coward's legs are his best weapons, gave up the fight and bolted.

While the two men struggled heavingly, Zoronna stooped to cut the boy loose, and I came to help, and we got him on his feet where he stood with the awkwardness of numbed limbs, and we tried to chafe and stir blood back into his legs and arms.

"Hear! They're breaking through!" Zoronna caught at my arm, listening, as above or through the screeching racket there came a crash—more like a jar than a sound. "The police are in the house—thank God!" she cried.

"We've got to get out!" I cried at her, my lips to her ear. "This mess—explanations

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—witnesses—no end of trouble. Don't you know a way out?"

She pointed in the direction that the fellow had gone when he ran, and I ran over to the wall and behind some of the scenery found a door—but it was locked. The fellow must have bolted it to prevent pursuit.

I came back. Zoronna stood with a sort of trance-like stare, watching the two fiends locked in powerful arms, where they swayed convulsively. Their breathing was like the blow of a great wheezy bellows. They were so interlocked that one could hardly tell which was which; but by the heave and straining something desperate seemed at hand.

With sudden blows and jerking, Horrezko broke lose and bounded back with the springing leap of an angry ape shaken from a tree-top—back again, then snatched down as if by instinct and not by sight, at the long *kris* where it had fallen when the man who struck at me died.

Then the fight ended. With a roar as from the throat of a lion, Zitka hurled himself, and it seemed to me that he struck as he was in the air.

Horrezko reeled backward and down, the sharp lips of a long knife at his throat—and it sucked his strange life away. How he died, with what writhings and thrashings about, or whether with the mocking stoicism that the foredoomed may have, I do not know; for at once some door leading down from up-stairs crashed in—and I shot again and again and again, high and harmlessly, to stop the rush. The glimpse that those officers had before dodging back from my gun must have filled them with amazement—all that noise of the mechanical hell-creatures, the flare of fire, the feverish queerness of the light—for they were silent, as if with wonder for a half-minute or more.

Zitka, in that ghastly light, looking more repulsive than ever, looked triumphantly at me, his fleshy face overspread with a grin. I don't know what he said, whether it was in attempted English or not, but the gesture was across the flames—pointing the way; and with the agility and strength of the mountain bred, he caught up Genlis, and, carrying him, rushed toward the flame and leaped across, landing just under the black hole.

Without a word or sign of hesitancy, Zoronna moved to the fire, and, lifting her skirt, sprang and caught at Zitka's outstretched hand. Lifted by him, she climbed into the hole and disappeared.

I don't like fire, and here was a hot, flickering sheet of it—but I leaped and was unscorched. It was less dangerous than it appeared—a little more so than when a circus girl jumps through a burning hoop. Swiftness of movement kept me from being singed.

Then I turned, and scrambled into the black hole which opened at once into a passage some three or more feet wide and high enough to stand up without knocking in the top of your head. The last thing I did was to shoot a couple of times at nothing in particular; this just to encourage the police to hesitate another moment or so until I could swing the papier-mâché "stone" back in on the hole and leave the wall looking solid as ever. As I shot a fusillade answered from the doorway; but it shot blindly, for the hole was out of the line of vision. I pulled the "stone" into place—and for three days the newspapers talked of the mysterious disappearance made by myself, Zoronna and young Genlis. We were known by name, all of us excepting Zitka; but it was a long, long time before any of us were located by reporters.

## CHAPTER XVII

*There are no mysteries; there is never anything more than a lack of information.*

THE passageway—guarded by flames that also heightened the luridness of his hell—was one Horrezko had foresightedly prepared for his own departure in the event of some such emergency as did come up; and near the other end of this passageway, which opened into his garage were stored certain portable treasures, money, gems, bonds, and wealth enough to give him a new start. He had thought everything out and arranged it well; and though he was distrustful of everybody, and gave away no secrets, Julander, by spying, prying, meddling and watching, had discovered this passageway and planned soon to make a clean-up and disappear. The affair was precipitated by Horrezko learning that Julander had conspired with Zoronna to keep him fooled in the matter of young Genlis; and, investigating, he discovered that Julander had been playing all sorts of double games on him. Julander was thrown

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into the basement to await punishment; but he escaped; and was gone some hours before his disappearance was found out.

He knew of Zitka, and his hatred for Horrezko. Personally I shall always believe that he sought out Zitka, told him of Claude Genlis' danger, and offered to introduce him into the house, in the hope that he would murder Horrezko—for Julander must have had dread of the monstrous hunchback's ultimate vengeance.

Anyway he did that; and, evidently to make sure that Horrezko would have his hands full of trouble that night, he also stirred up the police. As I learned afterward a couple of detectives came to investigate, merely to question; but the reception they got on saying they were officers convinced them of the need for breaking into the house at any cost—and they did.

Julander loaded up an auto with loot and was driving off—when the same officers that he had introduced into the grounds stopped him, saying he must be detained as a witness; and they investigated, found all the wealth, seized it, and slammed Julander into jail.

Our departure was uneventful. The garage was not guarded, and the grounds were dark, with a great many people on the outside of the police lines—sightseers, curious ones, gawkers, who, inevitably as vultures to a carcass, flock to wherever the police have work to do. We passed through and around the people, got to the auto, and went away.

The police took Delano, whom they knew and for whom they had much respect, to the hospital; and they took Calversley, whom they did not know, but for whom they had much respect since Delano claimed him for a friend, to the same hospital—and there was a seven day sensation and scandal over the fact that he was "kidnaped" from this hospital, and disappeared, no one knew where. I arranged the "kidnaping", for I did not know what hour the police might discover that his name was Calversley—instead of Calvert as he claimed—and I had no way of foretelling that Julander would declare the truth of the affair, of how Calversley was innocent of the killing and Horrezko had arranged for his escape. On Julander's information the gunman who actually did the shooting was caught and somehow made to confess.

As for Zoronna and Claude Genlis, Zoronna told me:

"Why, he's only a child! I love him—love him desperately, as one loves a young baby brother. But you—you, Don Everhard, you ought to know me too well to believe that I would ever marry any man! I know men, all of 'em, too well to want to anyway!"

But Mrs. Dupper had got me into trouble. She wrote Hazel Guigane that she didn't think much of my wife. And Hazel Guigane—I don't know why—but Hazel Guigane wrote back to Mrs. Dupper that she was never to mention my name again, that she never wanted to hear it, that I was a thorough rascal—and when had I got married and what was the woman's name before she was married?

The one thing about this affair that really bothered me more than anything else was why, after Mrs. Dupper—when she came seeking information from me she learned that Zoronna was not my wife—wrote back the truth, Hazel Guigane should then answer:

"Don't pay any attention to what I said. I wasn't feeling well that day, and didn't mean a word I wrote. I would really be glad to see Don marry some nice woman and settle down. In fact, I was pleased to hear that he was married, and now I feel quite bad to have you say it wasn't so."

I may be dense, no doubt am; but it was a mystery to me why Hazel Guigane should write like that when over and over, with the frankness of a long-drawn friendship, she has told me that I wasn't fit to be the husband of the worst woman in the world.

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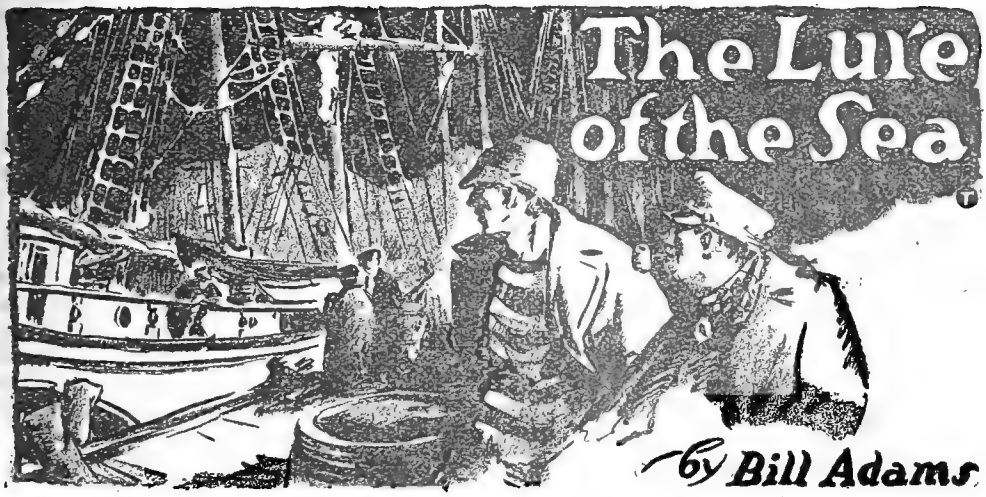


*Author of "Time Comes," Amos Tregenna," etc.*

## The Yarn of a Sea-Broken Sailor

### CHAPTER I

#### NEW CHUMS

SURROUNDED by many men he sat alone, appearing disconsolate. Near to him, ignoring him, as all the others, sat an old bearded man, reading a magazine; peering at the words upon the paper; a frown knitting his brows; spectacles resting upon the bridge of his nose. Behind him, a few feet away, two men rapped billiard balls to and fro across the green baize cloth, the balls clicking sharply: the two men speaking in low tones. A little fellow, evidently from the distant East, watched them; a cigar, appearing, in his mouth, prodigious, stuck at an upward angle between his lips.

In front of a large fire sat four or five men, talking in the language of a Scandinavian country, nodding their heads, spitting thoughtfully into the blaze; puffing, some vigorously, some indolently, at short pipes—one blowing clouds of cigaret smoke through his nostrils. There were men standing singly and in small groups, looking at nothing, staring in front of them, some talking quietly, some silent: everywhere all men there stamped with the same peculiar stamp; an indefinable mark.

There were large men, and small; old men, and young; men with long, thin legs and lean faces; short men with wide shoulders and hard-looking, close-set heads—the tall men with the suggestion of a stoop in their shoulders; the short men appearing as though having just let go a great weight—their arms, their hands, giving one the impression that they had lately been stooped. There were men who, though in complete restfulness, yet appeared as though listening; men who, while watching newcomers with eyes that saw all things yet appeared to see nothing.

Overhead was a large skylight; under it, running all around the four far-spaced walls, a gallery, upon the railing of which men leaned, looking carelessly at the scene below; coming from numerous small doors that, all around the gallery, opened upon it; staying a while to look and listen, and returning to their rooms. In a corner a young man sat at a piano; a small company surrounding him, listening to him, and intently watching his slender hands.

Presently he sang, and those about him seemed to shake themselves, to cast off their thoughtful look, and to awaken to a reality; some of them smiling, some wearing a frown; the men at the fire turning to listen as the song began, and, hearing the first words, swinging about; facing the fire again. The billiard players clicked the red and white balls unceasingly, the balls rolling, now slowly, now swiftly, to and fro over the green baize cloth.

The little man with the prodigious cigar

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between his lips took it in his fingers, his head on one side, listening very intently to the song—as if some one's life depended upon it, as indeed, to a certain degree, the lives of many did. The old man, laying his paper aside, took his glasses off, and, drawing a vast red bandanna kerchief from his pocket, wiped them with the utmost care, almost a loving care, and placed them in his inside breast pocket; the old fellow leaning about, over the arm of his chair, intent upon the song, beating time with one foot, his brows puckered.

Arm in arm, laughing, their laugh ringing all about the room, and up to the galleries above, three young men walked out to the street and the swiftly approaching night; no one noticing them, no one looking toward them any more than any there troubled to look at any other; seen but unnoticed; none caring when or whither any other went; no one watching his fellows, and yet all there appearing as if watching for some missing comrade.

The young lad, the disconsolate one, rose, and crossing the room, drew closer to the fire. They looked at *him*, some of them, smiling. His clothes were ill-fitting, hanging loosely on his limbs, as clothes made for some particular trade by a tradesman ignorant of that trade's peculiarities—the cut of the clothes, aggravated by the tradesman, appearing ludicrous. Taking a seat at the end of the bench, a little way from the circle about the fire, he looked about him.

The chorus of the song arose, swaying about the room; a song, it was evident, peculiar to the men gathered there; five or six voices taking it up; seeming to lift it, to balance, and to swing it along upon their voices as magicians balance and swing eggs and little balls of glass in their hands—mysterious things; and yet, to those familiar with them, things of great simplicity.

The song, though sung within a crowded room, below a skylight darkening at the close of a Winter's day, amidst thick tobacco smoke, where billiard balls went clicking to and fro, and where the hum of conversation was incessant, appeared to recall the lift of a swell upon the great ocean—the hum of a wind blowing beside the waterfront of some sea-circling city; there being to it, to the music as well as to the simple words of it, a strange magic; as many things of great simplicity hold yet the greatest of all magics. Even the men from the Scandinavian country, who sat about the blaze, did not, though not seeming to listen to the song, keep their feet, or their fingers, from beating time with it, lightly, almost imperceptibly.

One of the billiard players, striking a ball just at the lift of the chorus, missing his shot, gave the victory to his opponent. The small man, with the prodigious cigar, looked upward toward the skylight, nodding his head in time with the song. A man, passing out to the dusky street, turning about for a moment to listen, despite the fact that he had many a time heard that song before, and had probably often enough sung it himself, let in the shout of the high west wind that rollicked down the street, and, with it, the whispering hiss of the driving rain.

A young fellow, a boy, bearing about him already some of the seeming of manhood, entering the place and, seeing the lad who sat alone, went directly toward him, seating himself upon the bench close to him; looking straight into his face, smiling questioningly, in a friendly manner; edging along the seat yet closer to the stranger as though about to impart a confidence to him, and humming cheerily to the music of the song.

"Going to sea?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the other.

"Signed your indentures yet?"

"No."

"Don't sign 'em! Go back home. First train in the morning."

Looking at him somewhat surprizedly, the disconsolate one made no reply.

"The sea's hell!" said the other.

Still there was no reply; only a movement of the lips and eyes so slight that none could have seen it without looking closely into the youthful face; the lips closing, as though with the thought of a decision moving the mind above; the eyes taking for an instant a look of hardness, which, had a student of men's faces seen it, might have appeared amusing in one so young—and yet not amusing alone.

"We call the carpenter 'Chips,' and the sailmaker 'Sails,'" said the other, staring into his companion's face.

There being no reply to this peculiar statement, he spoke again.

"Are you staying at the sailors' home?"

"Yes, tonight," said the other; "tomorrow I go aboard ship."

"What ship?"

"The *Glenalvon*."

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"Why, then, we'll be shipmates! She's my ship."

The other looked hard at him; taking in every detail of his appearance, with questioning eyes.

"Do you think you'll like the sea?"

"I think so."

"Listen—the sea's hell! While you can back out, back out."

There being no reply to this advice he continued:

"My name's Glynn—Glynn Williams. What's yours?"

"Tim Merryweather."

"Oh! Then we'll call you Tim, eh?"

They sat side by side silent for a while.

At the piano a little crowd had gathered to listen, joining in a new chorus; the player looking up into the faces about him; the song rolling about the room, booming, rollicking, filling the place from floor to skylight—drowning the bluster of the west wind without; and as a man, entering, held the door open, the hiss of the accompanying rain:

"Her name shall be the *Rising Sun*—
*Doo da—doo da,*
"Her name shall be the *Rising Sun*—
*Doo da—doo da, day.*
"I'll load her down with sugar and rum—
*Doo da—doo da,*
"I'll load her down with sugar and rum—
Doo da—doo da, day."

"Tim," said Glynn Williams, "there's nothing romantic about the sea; if you think there is—*forget it.* If I were you I'd go home on a morning train."

A young man had entered from the street, and stood in the doorway, shaking the wet from his cap, and staring around the room. Seeing the two lads, he approached them, sitting upon the bench, holding his hands outstretched to the fire.

"Are you off the *Glenalvon?*" he asked.

"Yes, are you?" replied Glynn Williams.

"I'm going on board in the morning, for my first voyage. Have you been to sea before?"

"I have so," laughed Glynn Williams, "and I've just been telling Tim here to get out of it before he gets into it and to go home, and not to sign any indentures. Tim, old son, I tell you the sea's hell!" he added, turning to Tim.

Tim stared at the fire, from between the broad shoulders of the Scandinavian sailors sitting around it, saying nothing.

"Tell us something about it, will you?" asked the newcomer. "I signed my indentures this morning and they told me to join the ship tomorrow—is it really very hard?"

Glynn arose, sticking his hands deep in his trouser pockets, humming the chorus that was again arising from the company about the piano.

"You poor dog—oh, you poor dog!" he said. "I've got to go; the girl's waiting for me—me, see?"

And away he went, whistling the tune of the song.

"Oh, fare you well,
"My dear little girl,
"And away Rio;
"Oh, fare you well,
"My dear little girl,
And we're bound for Rio Grande."

The newcomer was a heavy, solid-looking lad with very black hair and very blue eyes; rather fat and appearing well-contented with himself. He wore a slight mustache, and on one hand a ring shone, matching the gold watch chain, that, hanging across his vest, gave him, with the good cut of his clothing, the appearance of being a rich man's son.

The two first voyagers sat silent for a time, each apparently wrapped in his own thoughts. Presently the newcomer spoke.

"Do you suppose it'll be as bad as that fellow made it out to be?" he asked.

Tim shrugged his shoulders, sitting staring into the flame.

"If I thought it was going to be as bad as he makes it out, I'd take his advice and go home in the morning."

"Forfeit your premium?" asked Tim.

"What's a little money?" asked the other, laughing quietly.

The company had thinned out; many having gone into the night; many to rooms about the gallery. Some still stood at the piano, where the indefatigable player yet strummed.

Saying, "Good night," Tim went to his room. Long after he had undressed, and was between the narrow covers of his cot, long after the click of billiard balls ceased, he heard the piano's persistent playing. As he lay, wide awake, unable to sleep in this strange place, surrounded by many who slept peacefully, and who, as men unused to long slumbers, never turned in their sleep, he commenced to keep time with the tunes from below.

Presently there fell a complete silence, as

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though all had departed; nothing being heard save the soft patter of the rain upon the skylight. Rising from his uncomfortable cot, he stretched himself; looking at the time—after one o'clock already—and stepped to the gallery.

As he stood there the fire flared brightly up, illumining the now darkened room in a ruddy glow; the flames leaped far up the chimney, and, as the fire died down again, a man, rising from the piano beneath him crossed the room toward the outer door; a man followed by his flickering shadow; a man seeming to belong in the midnight, to be a part of it, at home in it, happy in it—as but a minute before his songful voice had seemed.

Tim, as though impelled by some uncontrollable thought, leaned far over the railing; and the other, hearing him move, looked up; stopping to gaze at the white face on the balcony, glowing in the dying firelight.

For a moment they stood so, staring at each other. Then Tim spoke—

"Is the sea as hard as they say it is?" he asked.

The other, a puzzled look in his face, made no reply; but, swinging upon his heel, strode to the outer door. As he opened it, and the whip of the midnight wind roared by, his voice arose once more, seming to join with, and to dance with, the wind; seeming to roll, as the deep tones of iron ship bells roll at midnights on the sea; seeming to hold in it a sense of glory, of delight in the wild weather—as though a part of it.

Tim went back to his cot; and, falling asleep, heard the voice of Glynn Williams, saying, over and over, insistently—

"There is no romance at sea—if you think there is, go back."

He dreamed—that he was aboard a ship at sea, beneath a sky full of stars: a voice from over the waters singing—

"Oh, I can not marry you, my little girl,
For I'm bound for Rio Grande."

## CHAPTER II

### "FOR I'M BOUND FOR RIO GRANDE"

THE clipper ship *Glenalvon* lay somewhere off the Falklands, bound, in midwinter, around Cape Horn.

It was the second dog-watch, and a bright moonlight night; the sky pale blue, with strange lights in it; weird lights—as, many times, by night upon the ocean, there come weird lights in the sky. Upon the bridge stood "Egg" Martin, the mate. Egg had been so named by the apprentices for the reason that he was a remarkably smooth man, smooth shaven, round bellied, fat handed, hairless—unlike the gaunt, bowed figure of old Fin Hansen, the sailmaker, who, grizzled and hairy, bore resemblance to an aged, far-traveled, and ever watchful ape. At Egg's side stood Pat Hickley, third mate of the big ship; an apprentice, acting third and living aft, sharing the second mate's room.

The ship was under all sail—courses, lower and upper topsails, single topgallants, royals and skysails, with all her fore-and-afters set; her white wings piling high, one above the other, till they seemed to reach the very sky.

"Got a job for you, Pat—go take those skysails off her, and the royal staysails with 'em," said Egg Martin.

Pat, making no reply, took the bridge rail in his hands; and, swinging under it, dropped to the quarter-deck below, singing out an order as he did so.

As the hands jumped from the rigging, down from furling the skysails, and Pat Hickley returned to the bridge, the skipper came on deck.

A cloud, light as driven thistle down, passed across the moon; fleeting onward along the pale sky; hastening away, as though upon the wing of some great wind blowing far above the sea. Seeing it pass, the skipper went to the chart-house, studying the barometer; and, coming back to the bridge, stared at the heavens; watching, waiting, seeming as though he listened for the beating of the feet of some dweller in the high moonlighted skies. He stared into the binnacle, watching the ship's course; and back to the sky—across which there sped, here and there, far scattered wisps of down.

"Take the royals off her, and the topgallants—look alive, sir; there's a blow coming."

Before he had finished speaking, Pat Hickley had swung back to the decks, to clew the royals up.

Then, under the moon's light, hurrying amidst its wavering shadows, men hastened about the decks, hauling on many ropes, shouting as they bunted up the flapping canvas. Upon the bridge the skipper and

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his mate watching the weather; the ship lying far over, racing, with her rail awash to lee.

As eight bells was struck upon the forward bell the skipper spoke again.

"Get the courses all off her, sir."

"All hands shorten sail," shouted Egg Martin; and all hands commenced to bunt the three big courses up—fore and main-sails, and cross-jack.

Swiftly and steadily the wind was rising; sprays, despite her shortened sail, lashing over the ship; clouds, in ever increasing number, whirling across the moon; the lights in the high sky growing yet stranger; the wind moaning; the sea to windward lifting great white heads; sprays, whipped from their crests, passing in sheets over the ship.

The shapes of the men aloft, laying over the yards, picking the courses up, were clear cut in the night's brilliancy; their voices crisp; every rope, every spar, every uplifted hand, standing out with weird distinctness; lights shining as though reflections from the great green seas were cast high into the air, giving to it a pallid appearance as of transparent emeralds—the air as though reflected through emeralds, cold emeralds, frozen emeralds.

Far forward the long, flying boom was clear cut against the green seas ahead; lifting now, now falling with a dizzy rush to the deep hollows. Men's voices called from aloft, the mates replying from the deck; each accent tense, as though the speakers prepared for a struggle, for a combat with a terrific creature of the night whose approach was heard over the sea.

"Take the upper topsails off her, it's going to blow," said the skipper to Egg Martin.

With the three big courses furled, men were coming to the decks expecting to go below—the old watch weary with their long watch, and with taking in sail; the watch on deck ready for a breathing space; gathering, all of them, under the bridge-head, to await the relieving of the wheel and the look-out.

"Fore tops'l down-haul," said Egg Martin; and away they hurried to the fore rigging, taking hold of the down-hauls, singing out—

"All ready, sir—" And as the halyards began to run up, crying out upon the ropes—"Ee-oh-ho-ho-haul-away-oh! Down she comes! Ho-lee-yo-ho-yo-heave away, sons!"

"Mizzen tops'l," shouted Egg Martin; and to the mizzen, and thence to the main they went.

"Aloft an' make 'em fast," shouted the mate; and aloft they went again; sailors, apprentices, bosun and sailmaker, carpenter and cook and the second and third mates with them; shouting as they ran up the reeling rigging; crying taunts to each other; some one—some limb-weary fellow, saying, as they always say when it's wild weather—

"Who wouldn't sell a farm and go to sea?"

The ship lay, staggered under the force of the gale that was upon her, lifting in long slow circles to the head sea, her boom, as a thing alive, sensing its way through the hollows and over the ridges. Men's voices, lost in the growing fury of the wind, were swept away unheard; save, now and again, an accent, or the ring of a bellowed curse when the sail escaped their beating fists—fists of thirty sailormen at work aloft in the throat of a Horn gale—hard fists, fists with hook-like fingers, leather palms, driven up and down by hunched, bowed shoulders.

The sprays were driving clear over her, hiding her deck in a smother of green water; the seas pounding at her sides, and swamping, waist-deep, across her; men, coming from aloft, rushing, for safety, to the tops of deck-houses; cowering under the weather-rail, or grasping the lifelines, fighting their way along the deck, the sea to their waists.

An hour and a half of their precious sleeping time gone, the watch went below; a muttering lad opening the half-deck door, crowded upon and yelled at by the others; their forms shining in yellow oilskins, their voices blown away over the sea as screams of sea-fowl unseen.

"Open the —— thing—what in ——?"

Battling against the pressure of the gale upon it, they got it open at last; disappearing within. Tim, striking a light, lighted the smoky lamp; feebly illumining the little room, with its three bunks crowded together; one close above another, and one running 'thwartships of the vessel; with lockers beneath it, in which were kept food, water, oilskins, sea-boats, dirty clothing, marlinspikes, fids, pieces of old rope, and all such gear of the sea. They threw off their oilskins, tossing them aside; kicking their legs free of heavy leather sea-boots; eager for a little rest.

"Glynn, were you on the main top-gallant?"



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"Yes—a —— of a poor stow! I bet she blows adrift if it blows."

"Glynn, they're all poor stows. I haven't seen a good stow put on a sail tonight. I hope it don't blow!"

"It's blowing now, isn't it?" asked Tim.

"You wait—you'll see. We're off Stiff!" said Glynn.

They rolled in, the last blowing the lamp out; and in an instant slept; the sea pounding the half-deck, making it quiver; the wind howling about it; the ship staggering, diving, lifting, rushing dizzily into the meeting weather.

At six bells the skipper shouted in the second mate's ear—

"Call all hands—get that fore lower tops'l off her—it's going to blow."

The three lads in the half-deck, asleep now for an hour and a half, were roused by the voice of an apprentice of the second mate's watch, shouting:

"Rise and shine, you sleepers—rise and shine! All hands shorten sail."

He lighted the lamp, his sou'wester dripping salt water, his oilskins dripping salt water, his big sea-boots sodden with it; his face salt; his eyes aglow, as two stars, shining from below the rim of his sou'wester; his voice with a ring of laughter to it—laughter at arousing these weary fellows who had had but an hour and a half's respite from the battle. They arose, cursing the watch on deck.

"Why 'n —— can't you poor fools take that tops'l off her alone? What 'y' good for anyhow, eh?"

"Rise an' shine, you sleepers. Who wouldn't sell a farm an' go to sea?"

Taunting them, he went away; the yell of the hurricane coming through the door as, opening it, he sprang to the deck without.

"——! I rather guess it is blowing," said one.

"Let 'er blow! T' —— with her!" mumbled Glynn Williams, tying his soul-and-body lashings—rope yarns lashed at wrist and waist and ankle to keep the cold sea out With heads bowed into the wind, hands grasping life-lines, legs braced against the swirl of the sea, they came back to the decks.

"Clew fore tops'l up."

The order was lost, swept away; half heard by a crouching sailor, who repeated it to another; and thus along the deck from man to man where they huddled under the rail, or clawed against the deck-houses waiting for what was to be. Watching their chances to get across the deck they made for the tops'l gear between the lift and the dip, the incoming and the outgoing seas, lashed by the sprays sweeping in ceaseless clouds over her.

"All ready, sir," they bellowed; thirty of them; thirty men with their fingers freezing, and the salt sprays in their faces; men who, passing hard jests along, grinned—hiding their heads away, huddling them down to their shoulders.

"Haul-away-oh, ee-yee-yo-ho-ho, up she comes! Haul - oh - haul - away - oh! Ee-oh-HO!"

"Aloft and make her fast."

And, at Egg Martin's order, aloft they went again; simian shapes, crawling slowly up the rigging; held down, beaten upon by the wind; released for a brief space with the upward roll of the smitten clipper; beaten down and held again—utterly motionless; as great apes, frozen to the ladders; the ship an invisible thing, a shape lost in the sea smother—a battling sea-fowl caught far from home in the hurricane; her masts shining in the light of the full moon; her main and mizzen topsails white as snow on Winter's hills, her boom coming dizzily upward, in wild arcs, from the sea crests; the ship in the center of a crazed world; nothing visible for more than a few hundred feet of her; nothing within that space save white sea crests blown on the wind, in the eery glow of the green sea and the pallid sky. Upon the topsail yard-arms men, swinging on the foot-ropes, grasped at the wind-bellied sail; beating at it with doubled fists; yelling at it, at the wind, at the sea, at the ship; at life and at death; their voices mocked at by the tempest; carried away and lost.

Upon every mast sails were coming adrift; working loose from their gaskets. The topsail furled, men climbed higher, swaying a hundred and sixty feet above the sea, along topgallant and along royal yards, lashing the canvas anew; seeming, from the deck, as though they might gather the dazzled stars from the driven skies above them.

All night long they labored—men of the clipper ships, taking a clipper out to a far distant city; her holds filled with material for the building of cities. After an eternity of ghostly night, day came—day more dire

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than the night had been—day, showing the heaped-up ocean, the smallness of the clipper.

Going to the cook's galley, men yelled for coffee; seizing the skilly pot, holding it high overhead, out of the sea, fighting forward to the fo'csle; sitting there, in the dark fo'csle, sipping at it with salt lips; and tired eyes glowing above them—eyes glowing with a hard decision.

Soaked to the bone, the apprentices fought their way to the half-deck; carrying the precious coffee high; hunting under bunks in a foot of water for tin pannikins that rattled about in the jumble; banging from side to side with the roll; filling them full; sitting exhausted on their sea-chests, sipping the coffee, with their heads bowed and weary, cursing the old sea, cursing ships, cursing cargoes, sailors, skippers, mates and, heartiest of all, themselves.

The dark-haired lad, the one who had said that night in the sailors' home, "If I thought it was as hard as he says, I'd go home," entered; looking longingly at the coffee; his watch on deck—no coffee for him.

Glynn looked up, grinning at him, crying:

"How d' you like it, old son, eh? Think you'd sell a farm, heh?"

The other, shaking his head, looked mournfully at the sea-cuts in the joints of his hands; wide splits caused by the cold salt sea; in every finger-joint, across the palms, between the fingers.

"Rub 'em with pork fat, sonny—forget 'em!—we're all alike."

"Pork fat's salt," he said.

"——! Ain't the *sea* salt? Wot 'd'you want? Perfume for 'em, heh? Ha, ha, ha."

"That's good! —— if it ain't," muttered one of the others.

Shaking his head, he returned to the hurricane-swept decks.

"Get aloft there—main tops'l blowin' adrift," yelled the second mate, in his ear. He looked up at the second imploringly; wide-eyed, *frightened;* the second grabbing his arm, dragging him, pointing to the rigging, leaping into it.

"Aloft—look alive. She's blowin' adrift."

He started aloft, trembling at the sea fury, cowed with the cold's bitterness, with the hunger of it all; with the sickening tremble of the clipper. He went up the lower rigging slowly, his frozen fingers grasping the icy ratlines; soaked to the bone, his face crusted with salt; and, reaching the futtock shrouds—where one must climb outward upon one's back—waited there; not daring to go over them; a man born for service behind a counter, upon a farm, in an office—far removed from life's bold highways.

As, at last, he dared to climb the futtocks, to the topmast rigging, the foot of a descending sailor, striking him full upon the mouth, broke away two teeth, cutting his lips; so that the blood trickled down his chin, mixed with the flying spray. Spitting two teeth out, he hurried to the deck, out of the way of the sailors who had finished lashing the topsail; the second mate yelling in his ear, as he sprang to the deck:

"You —— lubber, you! Why didn't you stay on the farm?"

Bruised in mind and body he started toward the half-deck; half-frozen; the second mate shouting to him, pointing, gesticulating—

"Get those topsail buntlines out of the scuppers—coil 'em up."

He went toward the scuppers where, sweeping to and fro, the ropes lay; and reaching into the water grasped one; a sea, coming inboard, knocking him off his feet, washing him across the deck, bumping him into the hatch-coaming, bruising him; soaked to the bone in the cold sea. A sailor of the fo'csle crowd grabbed his arm, pulling him to his feet, grinning at him, shouting—

"That ain't the way to coil a rope, son."

He stood, clinging to the life-line; not daring to move, the sea up to his waist; the sailor bending down, reaching the sweeping ropes, standing knee deep in the water, and untangling them; watching for, feeling for, listening to, the throb of the ship trembling at the approach of a boarding wave; seizing the life-line, and bracing himself; waiting till the water had subsided once more, and again coiling the ropes; staying till his job was done, and fighting his way to the fo'csle; without looking at the apprentice who stood clinging to the life-line, too terrified to move; almost too cold to care what happened now.

The second mate, seeing him from the bridge, descended to the deck; hurrying toward him.

"Get to the poop, you poor fool—the poop—the poop! ——! Why didn't you stay on the farm?"

The apprentice, staring at him, followed him through an instant's lull between the

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blasts; to stand for an hour upon the poop, beaten upon by the spray and buffeted by the great wind.

All day the hurricane blew; and into the next night. They fought it out, hour by hour; lashing sails over and over again; rigging bumper-stays on the weather lower yard-arms; hauling the braces tight; hiding from the wind's lash, and the sea's uproar, as best they might. At midnight the wind began to abate; the skipper standing on the bridge, watching the weather.

"Loose the fore tops'l, and main upper," he said as the bell was struck eight times; the order ringing above the outcry of the dying tempest; men coming from their bunks half-awake, their limbs aching, and climbing to the rigging to set sail again.

After sheeting home the fore lower topsail, they gathered, a long line of twenty-five sailors, at the main upper topsail halyards, ready—

"Hoist away."

"Hoist away it is, sir! Eee-oh-ho! Haul-away-oh! Yo-ho-ho! Haul-away-oh! Some one give her a chantey."

Clegg, the second mate, standing forehand at the halyards, with a note of triumph in his voice sang—

"Come all you young sailors that follow the sea."

And they lay back, awakening afresh to the old challenge of the sea; the grim sea, beaten once more; the cold sea; the gray old woman upon whose breast they lived; singing the chantey refrain, all together, hauling on the wet rope:

"—to me, way-hay-yoh-ya—
"Come all you young sailors that follow the sea—
And a long time ago—
"And I'll sing of an incident happened to me—
To me way-hay-yoh-yah—
"And I'll sing of an incident happened to me—
And a long time ago.
"At twelve years old I was sent to school—
To me way-hay-yoh-yah—
"At twelve years old I was sent to school—
And a long time ago—
"But I could not stand my master's rule—
To me way-hay-yoh-yah—
"But I could not stand my master's rule—
And a long time ago.
"One day I read about the sea—
To me way-hay-yoh-yah—
"One day I read about the sea—
And a long time ago—
"And like a young bird, I longed to be free—
To me way-hay-yoh-yah—
"And like a young bird, I longed to be free—
And a long time ago."

Men went aloft, to the fore and mizzen, casting the gaskets off the topsails; the hands on deck waiting, looking over the sea, where the crests lopped, no longer driven by the hurricane. They chanteyed the sails to the mast-heads, singing:

"Oh, Boney was a warrior—
A long time ago.

and:

"Ranzo was no sailor—
Poor old Reuben Ranzo—
"And he shipped on board of a whaler—
Ranzo, boys, Ranzo."

"Go below the watch," Egg Martin shouted; and the watch, eager for sleep, went below; leaving the second mate's watch to clear up the ropes; to loose the topgallants, topmast staysail, flying jib, spanker, and foresail.

At eight bells, four of the morning, when Egg Martin returned to the bridge, Will Clegg, the second mate, said—

"Mr. Martin, what in thunder's the matter with her?"

"What is it?" asked the mate.

"Look at her, sir—see how she lies? All listed to port!"

"My God, you're right! She's shifted cargo—here's a —— mess!"

He went to the speaking-tube, which ran down, through a taffrail stanchion, to beside the old man's bed.

"Better come on deck, sir. She's shifted cargo," he said.

In a moment the skipper was on the bridge.

"Call all hands and get below. We've got to trim ship—we'd lose her if a squall came up; another hour of that blow and she'd have gone—a close call!"

Clegg jumped to the deck, with Pat Hickley, singing out—

"All hands on deck."

They called the watch below out: those tired men who were but just rolled into their warm blankets; just asleep, with the old sea forgotten; dreaming, if dreaming at all, of a place called Home—of the shore, and rosy-lighted windows of an evening; of women's voices, calling to children; of old acquaintances from over the world, met up with at street corners.

"Get that fore hatch off, boys—look alive there!"

They stood around, sleepy and cold, just from their warm bunks, still fastening buttons and belts; cursing the sea and ships

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and themselves for poor fools with no sense to be following the old sea.

They went down into the sail-locker, rolling the big sails to one side, uncovering the hatchway to the lower hold and, prying the hatches off, stood staring below into the darkness; lanterns, passed down to them from deck, casting shadows here and there; shapes dancing in the darkness about them; the lower hold a black hole below them—filled with coke, as though they had stumbled upon the devil's coal-yard itself.

With the lantern lights flickering upon them, shining upon the moist ribs of the ship, and the rust-stained stringers, they commenced to shovel the coke, tossing it to one side; digging a hole through it to get to what lay beneath; huge rats coming to sit upon the stringers, staring at them, with little devilish eyes; whisking their tails and scurrying out of sight into the surrounding gloom, squeaking; stopping to sit upon their haunches and to stare back at them.

Digging through the coke they came to bars of pig iron, lying on the bottom of the ship's hold; and, rigging a tackle, commenced to hoist them to the between decks hold, up through the sail locker hatch; stacking them far over against the side of the ship to straighten her up, and to get her upon an even keel.

Egg Martin, peering down at them from the main deck, shouted—

"Go below the watch."

The watch, dusty and grimed, and worn with work, climbed the ladder to deck, hurrying away to their bunks again to snatch what was left to them of their sleep.

When, at eight, the second took the decks over, they shoveled the coke back; filling the hole they had dug; breathing in a cloud of dust; sweating; looking, by the lantern light, as a company of devils who prepared a place for guests expected from the upper regions; the white belly of the big foresail directly above them, visible through the hatchway, seeming as the wide wing of some monstrous bird, soaring above, and watching them.

With tons of the pig-iron shifted to the between-decks hold and with the hole in the coke filled again, they swarmed to the deck; putting the hatches on, drawing long breaths of the fresh cold air; looking at one another from eyes that shone in black and sweat-lined faces.

"You looks like a crowd of blasted steamboat men," said the carpenter, coming forward to batten the hatches down.

"Get the after hatches off," said the second.

And aft they went to open the hatch and to descend to the between decks hold again. The after hold was not filled to the top; and there was room down there to move about, upright. The ship, under a wide spread of sail was making seven knots on her course, the wash of the sea alongside just audible from the gloomy hold.

The oldest man in the fo'csle, old Wispy they called him, a man of medium height but of tremendous width, with a heavy drooping mustache and beetled eyes, and with extremely bowed legs, seized another old fellow, the ship's Jonah, an old chap called Smith, an eccentric, grizzled little party with but one eye, and a hideous cavity where the other should have been, and arm in arm the two executed a strange dance down there in the darkness; the lanterns flickering upon them; the shadows of their crooked legs floating upon the ribs of the ship; only their shadows visible as, disappearing behind the stanchions, they were hidden from sight of the others; who stood looking on, grinning, with wide eyes, tired, black, sweaty; but grinning at the two old fellows, who, tired also, and also black and sweaty, could still dance; the rats scurrying hither and thither, squeaking amongst them.

The second mate came down.

"What in —— are you two crazy old —— at, eh?" he asked, smiling, unable to be stern with such valiant old fighters of the sea; such antique children.

"Come along, now—get her straightened out. Move that junk over there to the starboard stringers—get a move on! Let's get some fresh air."

They hung the lanterns upon the beams overhead and bent over crates stacked one upon the other; crates marked, "settler's effects"—plows for the prairies, harrows for the hollows between the low hills of the land; mowers for the green grasses of fenced meadows; tools and implements for the farmers of the land.

They lifted lengths of railroad iron—iron rails that should lie straight for league on league across a continent; these men who plowed the open meadows of the sea; harvesting no crops, following no seen track—the call of the sea-winds only, and the un-

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seen trails along the rolling ridges, through the deep green hollows.

The old chap, old Wispy, sat down.

"Mister," he said, "did you ever see old Liverpool Liz a-dancin' of the fandango? Up there by Dad's Place, on Pacific Street?"

"I never did. Why?" replied the second mate.

"Why, sir! I tell you, sir, it's an eddication for to see her. This, sir, is the way of it."

And, getting up, up from a crate that held a plow for the landsman's plowing, he pulled out his faded shirt tails, and, holding them out, to this side and to that, danced the fandango—as Liverpool Liz danced it at Dad's Place, up by Pacific Street.

"Well, I'll be ——! Is that how it is, Wispy?" asked the second mate, stepping back to watch him.

Taking a lantern down, a man held it up, its light wavering on old Wispy's face, his shining eyes, his swaying feet, his uplifted arms.

"Well—I'll be ——!" said the second mate. "Get a hold of that crate, Wispy. One Eye, give him a hand. Get it to the starboard side. ——! Let's get some fresh air."

They returned to their toil.

The two old men, rising from a stooped attitude above a crate of settler's effects, standing face to face, their noses almost meeting, whispered to each other,

"No!—That was Bess, at the 'Falmouth for Orders' *estaminet*. Liz were different—she were better natured than Bess."

"You two old swabs get a hold of that crate," shouted the second.

"Aye, aye, mister! Mister—would you be likely to recall, sir, just what was the color of Bess O'Leary's hair? Up there to the 'Falmouth for Orders' *estaminet*, sir?"

"Get a hold of that crate. Confound you and your old dames."

"Aye, aye, sir!—I was a figurin' sir, as it were a kind of pale yaller."

The second, leaning over a rail, grinned. A while before he had sat with Wispy a hundred and fifty feet up over a hurricane-swept sea, lashing a topgallant; his fingers freezing, his skin soaked, the wind yelling about him; Wispy shouting—

"Reckon Liverpool Liz'll still be up there by Pacific Street when this blows over, sir?"

Amongst them labored young Blood—the lad who would have backed out had he thought the sea would be as hard as Glynn Williams painted it. His arms were tired, his hands sore, his whole soul revolting at the hideous toil. The voices of the old men revolted him; the shadows on the stringers; the stuffy smell of the ship's hold; the rats that scurried and squeaked. Crouching low in the side, hidden between bales of merchandise, he tried to snatch a wink of sleep; his eyes heavy with weariness.

"Where's that —— boy? Hey—you there—why in —— didn't you stay on the farm? Get a hold of the end of this rail, so. Easy, now, you blanked fool; don't let go of it—there—so—all right. Ease her down. By ——! We'll make a sailor of you yet."

"Mister, how many more of these rails is we goin' to shift, sir?"—From Wispy.

"That'll do, boys. Get to the deck. Three of you put the hatches on. Chips, old son, batten 'em down, eh?"

"Loose the royals. Three hands aloft. Hey, you, there, boy—hop up and loose that main royal—step lively."

Blood went to the main royal yard; a boy with no head; nervous aloft, and trembling; preferring to go rather than to stay on deck and face the ridicule of these sailors.

The clipper was on an even keel again, snorting toward the old Horn, every one happy; men at the braces singing out, shouting, bellowing:

"Eee-oh-oh-ho-ho! Haul-away-oh! Eee-oh-ho! Let her rip!"

She ripped. She tore through the smother with her royals set; a clipper bound away-oh down the sea roads; down the green prairies; down the long hollows—the unfenced fields of the sea—a wild bird of the tempest; white wings stretched, and wind-bellied.

## CHAPTER III

### "YARD ARM TO YARD ARM TOGETHER WE'LL GO."

THE clipper was speeding homeward, for Falmouth for Orders; her topgallants set and full; a westerly gale on her quarter; men, in twos and threes walking her decks, watching her go; watching the sails draw, and the sea run by; watching, far away, another ship dipping to it; racing, her bows deep burrowed in the sea, her

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boom dripping, her head-sails wet to the high leeches.

Clegg, the second, walked the poop—an evening at sea, home-bound; dreaming of a girl who waited in a little house down Tunnel Road, a hundred feet from the railway arch; seeing her eyes and her soft gold hair; hearing her fingers on the piano; her voice singing him welcoming songs—home from the sea.

"Oh, yard arm to yard arm together we'll go,
To me way-hay-yoh-ya!"

—she sang.

Blood was sitting on the after hatch, staring over the water, alone; a lad of another breed to these men; hating what they *said* they hated; his soul revolted at the coldness of it, at the everlasting wash of the eternal ocean around him; at the poor food, the salt horse, the pork, the pea-soup, the marmalade in huge cans, the tepid water from rusty tanks; at the work, work, work—unending labors; scrubbing, scouring, painting; hanging to reeling spars with the ship beneath him dancing as a Barbary Coast girl dances—in utter abandonment to her calling; hanging, scared and nervous, where others went as on a city's street.

Coming from the wheel, Glynn passed him there.

"Hello, old son! Ain't she booming? See that old tub over there? That's the *Arctic Stream*, Taltal for Falmouth. We'll beat her there by two full weeks. You see!"

Blood looked up at him; his eyes wide and vacant, his face pale; his hands still sore—never yet hardened to the toil of the sea.

"You'd sell a farm, eh, old son?" asked Glynn, laughing, looking across to the *Arctic Stream*, a home-bound ship.

"NO! NO! Never again for me—once I am home."

"——, man!—I'm home *now*. What more d'you want, eh? Feel that," he said, holding out an arm, showing Blood his tough muscles.

Putting a hand inside his jumper, he pulled out a picture, a photograph of a young girl with long hair and with laughter in her eyes; a pretty girl—a sailor's girl.

"See that, eh?—Ah, she's waiting for me, son! *She'll* never marry a lubber."

Putting the picture in his pocket he went forward, humming a tune—

"Come all you young sailors that follow the sea."

## CHAPTER IV

### THEN I CAN NOT MARRY YOU

THE ship was off the Lizard, taking signals from the signal station, her orders. The skipper, looking up from the code book, spoke to the mate:

"All right, sir. It's for Liverpool. Starboard braces, sir."

They ran to the braces, swinging the yards; laying the clipper's course for Liverpool; singing on the ropes; watching the shore glide by. While they coiled the ropes up Glynn drew Blood aside, pulling a picture from his inner pocket: a girl with long hair, and with laughter in her eyes.

"Waiting for me, old son, see? *She'll* never marry a lubber—*not much!*"

An order was shouted—

"Loose the main royal," and Glynn replied, shouting—

"Main royal it is, sir—aye, aye."

Leaping to the rigging, he swarmed aloft over the futtock shrouds, over the cross-trees, up the topgallant rigging, and along the royal yard. Loosing the sail, he shouted to the deck, a hand to his mouth,

"All clear, sir—hoist away."

He sat at the head of the royal rigging while they ran the sail up, the canvas flapping about him; the songs of the men on deck reaching to him; and, putting a hand inside his jumper, drew out the picture, gazing at it:

"A couple more days, girlie, eh? Ah, *she'll* never marry a lubber."

The royal yard was up, the sail set, the braces tight; and, seizing the clew-lines, up he went, swarming to the yard again to overhaul the buntlines.

At the Lizard Station flags were flying, their bright colors all aflutter; the numbers of the clipper, at her peak, dancing in reply. The land shone green and soft under the warm sun of Springtime, little white houses all atwinkle by cove and bay and headland; the sea specked with the brown sails of the Cornish fishing-fleets; the sky blue above the green water of the channel; traffic coming and going, inward and outward bound; liners, tramps, and coasters under sail or steam; deep-watermen signaling to the Lizard as they came in from sea.

Glynn stood high upon the foot rope, taking his hat off, drawing a long breath of the old sea's freedom; waving his hat, laughing, signaling to the people aboard an inbound

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liner from New York, crowding to the rails to see the big rust-sided clipper sailing by—dancing on the sea floors.

Along the clipper's decks a shout rang out; taken up and cried from mouth to mouth; men with set lips running swiftly to sheets and tacks and braces; the steamer, bound up-channel, swinging upon her heel, racing toward the clipper; a boat dropping from her davits as she came, with the foam about her bow; a fishing lugger, her helm thrown up, slipping through the sea, her sheets eased away, a bone in her mouth.

The clipper lay, idly lifting on the sea, her main yards aback, her numbers still flying to the wind; the sea lapping round her.

The steamer's boat was at her side; the fishing lugger lying close by; an empty life buoy bobbing mockingly upon the tide.

The clipper's crew, old Wispy, One Eye, Pat Hickley, the cook and steward, Chips and Sails, stood silent beneath the bridge-head with the hand of the old sea mother on their shoulders—sailors come to the doors of home, home from her wide crying.

The steamer dipped her ensign to the half-mast—for a drowned sailor.

The ship dipped her pretty numbers. The fishing lugger, hauling her sheet, stood away to the shore, with tidings of the sea.

They picked up his hat, and a picture that drifted on the tide beside it.

Blood was silent.

"It might have been me," he thought.

In the fo'csle the sailors talked quietly; with a shipmate gone, upon the doorsteps of home.

"D'you remember when old Betty's man got drownded?" asked Wispy.

"Aye—I asked her to marry me a week arter," replied old One Eye.

They looked up, grinning at the old man.

## CHAPTER V

### "AND AWAY, RIO"

SURROUNDED by many he sat alone, appearing disconsolate. Near to him, ignoring him, were many men; men who came and went; men who stayed awhile to read, to write, to play a game of billiards, to strum upon the old piano in a far corner of that vast room; men who stood singly or in little groups, looking at nothing, staring in front of them; everywhere, all men there, stamped with the same peculiar stamp; an indefinable mark; men, who, though in complete restfulness, appeared as if listening, as if, though seeming to look at nothing, they yet, each of them, watched for some half-expected comrade.

A young fellow, a boy, bearing about him already the marks of manhood, entering the place, and seeing the lad who sat alone, went directly toward him; looking at him curiously, inquisitively, questioningly.

"Going to sea?" he asked.

"Yes—with the ship *Glenalvon*, in the morning, sir."

"Don't, 'sir' me—I'm no dog—the *Glenalvon's* my ship, too. We shall be shipmates. My name's Tim, Tim Merryweather, what's yours?"

"Bond, Patrick Bond."

"We'll call you Paddy, eh? D'you think you'll like it?"

"I think so——"

"Listen—you *won't*. It's hell. Get out. Back out. Don't sign your indentures. Skip while you can; see?"

"Why don't you quit too, then?"

"Me? Oh, that's different! I'm spoiled—I'm spoiled for anything else!"

At the piano a man was playing an old tune; those about him joining in the chorus, making the simple words as words of some peculiar and not to be resisted magic—as oftentimes the simplest things hold a magic not to be gainsaid, a magic irresistible.

"Oh, I can not marry you,
"My little girl,
And away, Rio;
"Oh, I can not marry you,
"My little girl,
And we're bound for Rio Grande."

"And away, Rio,
"And away, Rio,
"Oh, I can not marry you, my little girl,
For we're bound for Rio Grande."

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# A Strange Company

by F. St. Mars

*Author of "Arms and the Beetle," "Sea Wolf," etc.*

*That flood strewed wrecks upon the grass,*
*That ebb swept out the flocks to sea.*

IT HAD been a bad "thirst."

Now it was going to be a worse "wet."

What had happened was only that some ten inches of rain had fallen in as many hours somewhere up among the foot-hills of the mountains. And the resulting flood could be heard coming down the shrunken river with the dry, purposeful *"Ar-r-r-r!"* of a rough sea upon a pebble beach.

The primeval Amazon forest lay out all asleep, leagues upon leagues of interlaced tree-tops, vines and creepers, epiphytes, orchids and aerial roots; leagues upon leagues of stiff, straight wood pillars; leagues upon leagues of damp soft mold, unhampered by brushwood, in the everlasting gloom.

Asleep? Yes, most of the respectable part of the forest was. The other, the shady side of forest life, was awake, prowling, furtively awake.

The ocelot, standing upon the river-bank, looked up-stream with the quick, direct, insolent stare of his kind. He was a very beautiful cat, the most beautiful, perhaps, of all that wickedly beautiful big tribe—like the silver moonlight dappled with leaf-shadows.

He was a smallish large sort of a cat, about five feet four inches from tip to tip; a wonderful soft, looking-pussy; till you saw his face, till you beheld the sinister, inscrutable glint of his eyes through the night—then you postponed stroking, and reached for your gun.

The ocelot yawned with cynical indifference in the eye of the silent moon. Then the flood came round the next bend up-stream in a solid wall, and the thirsty sand of the river-bed yawned back at the feline as the shallows began to fill.

The ocelot shut his mouth in almost audible haste, and sprang for the nearest tree. It happened also to be the largest.

After the first colossal roar and confusion of the flood had gone by, the ocelot got back his head. He had lost it at the impact, as it were, of the tornado of waters, and discovered himself climbing like a crazied thing sixty feet up; as if the water could reach him there.

Down below, the forest seemed to be afloat and beginning to move uneasily in the dark. The ocelot could see the glint of restless waters everywhere.

The beast stopped, half-propped upon an orchid of pantomime proportions with its roots in the air. He looked down. The fur began to lift along his back. His tail became a bottle-brush. His slit ears flattened. Like all cats, he looked most ferocious when afraid; and he *was* afraid, too! There was something wrong somewhere. He could feel it through his spine pressed against the stupendous stem. The tree monster was telegraphing throughout its two hundred feet of iron bole to all its



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far-reaching branches, to all its roots, too, and suckers—for help!

The tree was afraid!

Put your ear to one end of a big tree-trunk next time you go into a timber-yard, and get a friend to tap the other end with a pin; and climb on to it, and hear for yourself how even a dead tree can talk. How much more then can a living one, and such a giant in a continent of giant timber, and to a beast whose senses are so many dozens of times sharper than our civilization-blunted ones to feel such things!

The ocelot cringed from painted head to almost white heel—cringed, and shriveled, and was still, utterly, clinging, spread-eagled, stiff, like an insect on a window-pane in rain.

There had sounded a faint snap in the wet dark below. It was only a lesser noise, as if some one had stepped upon a twig. It was, or seemed to be, really of no importance at all, for the flooded forest was full of snaps, cracks, and reports of one kind and another; many, most, of them far louder than that which had terrified stiff the usually fearsome ocelot. Men said, by the way, that he was untamable. He was tamed now right enough—with terror.

For about ten aching, silent, long-drawn seconds nothing happened—nothing *seemed* to happen.

Then the ocelot discovered a fact. The pillar of the tree against which he rested, was no longer quite perpendicular. It sloped a little out of the vertical. He could feel it, because his lean against it was now more of a lie. Yet nothing seemed to be happening yet; all was dead still.

At last without any kind of warning a liana as big round as a small tree, clinging somewhere, snapped with a report like a twelve-bore gun; and in the same instant, or a fraction after, the ocelot screamed.

The mighty tree, the forest giant, was falling—headlong; yet so slowly at first, so grandly, so majestically, so deliberately, that for those few pregnant seconds at least it had been almost unnoticeable.

Then commenced the roar. It was like the roar of an avalanche, growing, growing, growing, till it filled the night, the forest, apparently the world, engulfing all other sounds in one stupendous, sweeping cataclysm of sound. Then—then the crash.

Mighty interlocked branches of giant tree neighbors, the complete heads of some smaller, vast network systems of huge liana cables, creepers, aerial roots, climbers, drew taut, snapped, and were carried away *en masse*. Thirty palm-trees went down in that tumble; a dozen smaller trees, a hundred bush-trees, marantas and such like, were involved in the death of the giant. A great gap was torn in the forest itself.

One did not need to be near at all to know when the king of the worlds hit the ground. The dull, reverberating, hollow thunder of the impact could be heard miles away. It was rather like a submarine-mine explosion in sound and in appearance, for the vast, shaggy crown—a little world in itself to beast and bird and reptile and insect—rebounded high in air again like a live thing; the enormous butt, with its miniature forest of roots, plowed back in the last death struggle, driving a mighty trench, into which the flood poured as a river through opened lock-gates; and a perfect trail of branches, twigs, big leaves—large enough to injure—"bush ropes," creepers, epiphytes, orchids, big nuts, fruits and rubbish of every kind, continued to fall all about for some time after the monster itself had settled down finally upon the small mountain of tumbled, broken chaos that held up its head in the end free from the flood, as on a colossal pillow of débris.

The ocelot had glued to the main trunk as the king of the forest staggered to its doom, glued as only a cat can—like a burr. But the stupendous concussion and paralyzing jar of the final impact were too much for even his claws!

He executed one complete arc through the moonlight—as everything else seemed to be doing all about too—caught up in what appeared to be a waterspout that landed him—if one may use the term here—with a good few other things all spread-eagled and spitting, in the flood.

The ocelot remained there for some seconds, floating, apparently dead, half-supported upon a mass of Oncidium orchid, whose roots had never touched earth. Then he awoke with great suddenness and swiftness from his half-stunned stupor and with language and jumping gymnastics suitable to the painful occasion, leaped wildly into the boiling waters, and swam strongly—as most inhabitants of those river-threaded forests can swim—to the main trunk.

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That orchid, which had lived all its life at the summit of the giant tree, was, at the behest of the insistent waters, giving up not less than two nests full of different sorts of red-hot biting ants, two poisonous spiders, one six-inch centipede, and five cockroaches. No wonder the ocelot quit.

Probably the ocelot would have swum to land if there had appeared to be any anywhere. But the moonlight showed only silver, hurrying waters whenever it showed anything at all; and at least the tree was on hand, and very big.

That one end of the huge trunk was already floating slowly out into the stream, however; and that the other end, to the accompaniment of crackling like musketry fire at close quarters, was parting with its last vegetable subjects still clinging to the king even after his dethronement, did not strike the still dazed ocelot till too late.

Indeed the first hint that he garnered of what was going to follow came when the trunk shifted a little under his feet, rolled round a trifle—enough to make him shift his paws and glance about. The fallen forest monarch was afloat.

THE force of the flood was swinging one end of it out into the river, as the force of the flood had carried away the river-bank and brought down the great tree in the first place.

Then that ocelot-cat beast, ghostly pale in the moonlight in all his silver and jet beauty, got wise. He raced along the bridgelike stem toward the head; then stopped, sliding, with all four legs stuck out stiff, at the invitation of the most enormous snake's head he had ever conceived and the worse thing in hisses even a snake ever evolved. He knew the world's biggest serpent, the anaconda, cousin of the boa constrictor, and required no further introduction. He recoiled upon himself and galloped for the high, prow-like root end, reached it, sat on his tail, spitting, claws scraping bark, and leaped sidewise into the flood.

The ocelot came upon a tree porcupine, fat, slow, square-headed, some thirty-five inches long, and of course "at all points armed." He had his head tucked down, waiting for the ocelot to come on—into his back hair, so to speak, if the cat was fool enough.

However, the ocelot could not splash about overside for ever, especially since the great tree had decanted some of its citizens; and he found himself swiftly created into a raft by desperate insects, mostly ants, all struggling for a hold and all getting it with their jaws. He sank his pride, landed on the tree again with alacrity by one enormous unsmashed bough, shook himself furiously and sat down to clean off what would not shake.

It was at the beginning of that time that the giant tree swung clear of forest and friendly entanglements and floated out into the main stream of the river.

It was at the end of that time that the ocelot looked up and was introduced to his third shipmate—a lesser ant-eater, an amazing beast, about three and a half feet long, yellowish-white with a cape of black, with a face like a long beak, a prehensile, naked tail, no shoulder-blades and no teeth!

This does not sound very formidable, and the ocelot had never taken much thought of the clan before except to look out for the chance of sampling one by surprize. But now with the oddity facing him bowed but sitting up, the middle three claws on each forefoot, which is held up in front of it, seemed to fascinate his eyes. They could have vandyked him easily. They were—enormous!

The ocelot glanced overboard and beheld several logs floating near by in the silver water. Every third one, he knew, was probably an alligator. They were not there for nothing. Alligators never are.

Wherefore the ocelot leaped, light as blown foam, over the ant-eater's head, and got back to the main trunk. He was not going to be cut off from that for anything anyway.

He looked almost the color of the moon-silvered bark, and his chain pattern in black was like the shadows in the grain. But his eyes gave him away. They were alight, burning, green lamps that shone unblinking. Once only they changed color, and for as long as one takes to heave a sigh were pure violet. That was when he flattened down suddenly.

He had realized that the mammoth of timberland was no longer a tree merely, but a ship that sailed perilous seas. She was already traveling at four miles an hour in full mid-stream by the way. A ship without a helmsman, but manned by a full

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crew. A ship without oil, but showing many lamps. A silent ship, full-rigged, sailing—with sealed orders. And the lamps were the staring, joyless eyes of animals, of creatures that had lived in the monster tree, of the remnant of the little world in itself that had been saved from the *débâcle.* Some of them had rarely before been lower than seventy feet above the ground in their lives, a few perhaps never.

Verily a strange company, a stranger vessel, and strangest of all the voyage.

And the ocelot looked up-stream at water, down-stream at more water, away into the forest, between the ranked tree-boles standing in water, all water, nothing but water, and—the floating tree.

He curled himself up, but not to sleep. There were too many abroad upon the face of the flood for that. Who knew what might come aboard at any moment? Besides, they had enough of a crew to keep an eye upon already—a silent, watching company.

A deer, like a balloon, all four hoofs stiffly pointed to heaven, came slowly floating by; a dead wild dog, grinning an eternal set grin of unconcern in the pale glare, followed. Then a spider monkey, angular as a skeleton, still clinging tightly to the branch that had betrayed it on its fall.

The ocelot did not panic much at these things—but when a head appeared over the side, like a man boarding a ship over the gunwale, and stared the ocelot in the face, that highly strung feline nearly had a fit, had fairly blown up with spittings and hissings and snarls.

Indeed it was no joke, that head; also it was horribly angry.

Jaguar!

And what is jaguar? The South American edition of the leopard gone one better—or rather one worse; a super leopard with a super temper; a leopard run to seed. A devil of a leopard.

All the wild avoids the jaguar; and the ocelot, hating his relative—naturally—tried all he knew how to give the rosette-patterned brute room to swing in the fairway, so to speak. But he would not. The sight of his smaller cousin seemed to awaken all the worst—he had no best—in the beast; and he drove the ocelot in a snarly, moany, crouchy sort of way gradually out upon a branch till there was no longer any branch to drive him out upon.

Then the ocelot, whose language was sinful, dropped scientifically to a branch far below, and the resulting rebound of his original perch after release of his weight, dislodged the jaguar so that he took an involuntary bath, and enjoyed a desperate swim before he overtook the tree again, fortunately at the other end.

Thereafter the ocelot curled up once more, and this time slept, but with one eye open—the one toward the jaguar. Even then his slumbers were broken, for once something touched him and he awoke just in time to snarl off a death-while-you-wait poisonous snake, and once a scrapy, raspy noise fetched him all bristling out of dreams with a *"Hhh-u-r-r-rhl"* which was not lessened by discovering the noise to be the scales of alligators rubbing along the trunk overside. And a gang of powerful, maned, red howling monkeys—dislodged possibly by the jaguar—climbed by, and for a moment seemed like to tear him to pieces.

These things were finally too much, and the ocelot propped himself up with his green eyes open to meet the dawn.

It was as still as on the First Day. Not a breath of air stirred. The flood, sliding oilily, soundlessly, slipped the great tree along at four miles an hour. Everything was as clear-cut as in a good negative.

Far, far away in the forest a nightjar was wailing, "Poor me one" with the mournfulness of a lost soul; then two birds began a sustained trill and were still again. Then just as the first steely fingers crept out over the face of the waters, the red howling monkeys on the tree began to boom, and were answered by others deep in the forest.

A little bird, known as a slave, began to sing, and another, a *hanaqua,* joined in among the timber. A dove cooed somewhere, and a finch passed chirping. A cicada got to work on his fairy grindstone, and a swallow passed. Half a dozen scarlet macaws streamed by, screeching; and, like a flung jewel, a darting humming-bird flashed back the first sword-glints of the rising sun. It was day.

The ocelot got up, stretched, sleek and satiny, and set out to explore his ship of hope. From the top of a branch he looked down upon the whole scene as one looks down upon a battleship from the "high and lofty bridge," and indulged in a voiceless snarl—a habit of his—at the sight.

The jaguar, flat-eared and couched, occu-

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pied the big crown's biggest branch. Below a green snake hung like wet bunting. A capivara, which is a water rat as big as a pig, balanced perilously upon a lower bough, and along the main stem a couple of agoutis, which is a short-eared rabbit without a tail, sat cleaning. Next, and nearer, a spotted cavi, the father of all the guinea pigs, was gnawing something, and a huge lizard sat staring at the sun; quite close three brown monkeys with old-fashioned white faces huddled in a perturbed heap.

'Way back at the butt-end the immense coils of the anaconda glistened in the new light; a giant, weasel-shaped cat, a jaguarondi, crouched glaring just out of reach of the anaconda, and two partridge-like birds without a tail preened close by—too close, one would think. Then two more snakes; a sloth, upside down and sound asleep; the lesser ant-eater; an armadillo rolled up; the porcupine; an oppossum hanging by his tail, and a spider monkey, thin as its name.

The ocelot, being hungry, chose the spider monkey first as being the nearest and the least likely to hit back. Concealment was out of the question. They were now accompanied by a flock of terns, or sea swallows, who signaled all his movements with screams to any whom it might concern.

The stalk, therefore, consisted in making out that he did not see that thin monkey, and would not if he could. But when the rush came the spidery one retired, leaping like a grasshopper, among the red howlers, who formed up in battle array with disconcerting promptitude, and bade the big cat do his darnedest.

He, however, only voiced a soundless snarl, and walked off to worry the armadillo, who proved impregnable in his coat of mail; and the ocelot had just stopped to stare back up-river and wonder at the peculiar dwarfing of the forest on either side when a puff, cold and salt, patted him upon the back, and he turned to face the first sea wind of his life.

He looked and saw—nothing. No trees, no creepers, no flowers—nothing but water and sky meeting, and— Yea! What was that? A spurt of white, as it were a twelve-pounder gun fired far ahead; but it was a breaker really, that had struck something and gone off in spray.

Then the ocelot felt the great tree begin to lift and heave gently. For a quarter of an hour she did this, while all that silent, wide-eyes, lugubrious company hung on, then lifted good and true high aloft, and came down into the trough with resounding thunder.

The ocelot shook himself free of spray, and darted for a side branch just in time to avoid the anaconda, who, hating salt, was coming aft at a flat double, driving all before him.

What happened when the whole crowd got jammed up in the crown, or top, end of the tree, and the worst-tempered of all the cats, said jaguar aforementioned, and the biggest of all the snakes came face to face, the ocelot had no chance to see, being too much taken up with keeping his feet dry; but he heard. Oh, yes; he heard; and it was enough.

Moreover, the ocelot was taken up with something else, too, as were all the rest of that mixed crew one by one, till a great silence settled upon them, and it was "still" throughout the "ship," as it is when a man-of-war sights an enemy; and nothing could be heard but the boom of the mighty tree trunk, like distant guns, and it came down after each wave into the trough, and the smack and seethe and swish of the salt spray.

A vessel was approaching rapidly, heading in to what she at first thought was a wreck with tottering, broken spars in which a shipwrecked crew clung.

Followed a long pause, while the vessel hove-to, and a boat was lowered. She came, white-furled and lifting over the swell slowly, and with shouts. Then stopped.

A rifle cracked thinly across the waters.

The ocelot heard the short, sharp roar a jaguar makes on the charge, and almost in the same instant three more cracks. He was aware of a pounding, crashing whirlwind all about—the anaconda bitten with lead.

Then he jumped, landed in the sea, swam desperately along the trunk, scrambled out again farther up, was struck by a broken branch threshing about masterless, and—knew no more.

THE ocelot is in a certain zoological garden now. He is quite well, but still untamable as of yore, and by way of proof he gives a voiceless snarl as the onlooker turns away.

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# The Sea Hawk

## A Five-Part Story

### Part I

by **Rafael Sabatini**

*Author of "The Hostage," "Captain Blood's Dilemma," etc.*

## CHAPTER I

### THE HUCKSTER

SIR OLIVER TRESSILIAN sat at his ease in the lofty dining-room of the handsome house of Penarrow, which he owed to the enterprise of his father of lamented and lamentable memory and to the skill and invention of an Italian engineer named Bagnolo who had come to England half a century ago as one of the assistants of the famous Torrigiani.

This house deserves, together with the story of its construction, a word in passing.

The Italian Bagnolo had the mischance to kill a man in a brawl in a Southwark tavern. As a result he fled the town, nor paused in his headlong flight from the consequences of that murderous deed until he had all but reached the very ends of England. To the fugitive, Ralph afforded shelter; and Bagnolo repaid the service by offering to rebuild the decaying half-timbered house of Penarrow. Having taken the task in hand he went about it with all the enthusiasm of your true artist, and achieved for his protector a residence that was a marvel of grace in that crude age and outlandish district.

The main doorway was set in a projecting wing and was overhung by a massive balcony, the whole surmounted by a pillared pediment of extraordinary grace, now partly clad in a green mantle of creepers. Above the burnt red tiles of the roof soared massive twisted chimneys in lofty majesty.

But the glory of Penarrow was the garden fashioned out of the tangled wilderness about the old house that had crowned the heights above Penarrow point. Time and Nature had smoothed the lawns to a velvet surface, had thickened the handsome box-wood hedges, and thrust up those black spear-like poplars that completed the very Italianate appearance of that Cornish demesne.

Sir Oliver took his ease in his dining-room considering all this as it was displayed before him in the mellowing September sunshine, and found it all very good to see, and life very good to live. Now no man has ever been known so to find life without some immediate cause, other than that of his environment, for his optimism. Sir Oliver had several causes. The first of these—although it was one which he may have been far from suspecting—was his equipment of youth, wealth, and good digestion; the second was that he had achieved honor and renown both upon the Spanish Main and in the late harrying of the Invincible Armada and that he had received in that the twenty-fifth year of his life the honor of knighthood from the Virgin Queen; the third and last contributor to his pleasant mood was Dan Cupid who had so contrived matters that Sir Oliver's wooing of Mistress Rosamund Godolphin ran an entirely smooth and happy course.

So, then, Sir Oliver sat at his ease in his tall, carved chair, his doublet untrussed, his long legs stretched before him, a pensive smile about the firm lips that as yet were darkened by no more than a small black line

* *See Camp-Fire Note.*



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of mustachios. It was noon, and our gentleman had just dined, as the platters, the broken meats and the half-empty flagon on the board beside him testified. He pulled thoughtfully at a long pipe—for he had acquired this newly imported habit of tobacco-drinking—and dreamed of his mistress, and was properly and gallantly grateful that fortune had used him so handsomely as to enable him to toss a title and some measure of renown into his Rosamund's lap.

By nature Sir Oliver was a shrewd fellow and he was also a man of some not inconsiderable learning. Yet neither his natural wit nor his acquired endowments appear to have taught him that of all the gods that rule the destinies of mankind there is none more ironic and malicious than that same Dan Cupid. The ancients knew that innocent-seeming boy for a cruel, impish knave, and they mistrusted him. Sir Oliver either did not know or did not heed that sound piece of ancient wisdom. It was to be borne in upon him by grim experience, and even as his light pensive eyes smiled upon the sunshine that flooded the terrace beyond the long mullioned window, a shadow fell athwart it, which he little dreamed to be symbolic of the shadow that was even falling across the sunshine of his life.

AFTER that shadow came the substance—tall and gay of raiment under a broad black Spanish hat decked with blood-red plumes.

The smile perished on Sir Oliver's lips. His swarthy face grew thoughtful, his black brows contracted until no more than a single deep furrow stood between them. Then slowly the smile came forth again, but no longer that erstwhile gentle pensive smile. It was transformed into a smile of resolve and determination, a smile that tightened his lips even as his brows relaxed.

Came Nicholas his servant to announce Master Peter Godolphin, and close upon the lackey's heels came Master Godolphin himself, leaning upon his beribboned cane and carrying his broad Spanish hat. He was a tall, slender gentleman, with a shaven, handsome countenance, stamped with an air of haughtiness; like Sir Oliver, he had a high-bridged, intrepid nose, and in age he was the younger by some two or three years. He wore his auburn hair rather longer than was the mode just then, but in his apparel there was no more foppishness than is tolerable in a gentleman of his years.

Sir Oliver rose and bowed from his great height in welcome. But a wave of tobacco-smoke took his graceful visitor in the throat and set him coughing and grimacing.

"I see," he choked, "that ye have acquired that filthy habit."

"I have known filthier," said Sir Oliver composedly.

"I nothing doubt it," rejoined Master Godolphin, thus early giving indications of his humor and the object of his visit.

Sir Oliver checked an answer that must have helped his visitor to his ends, which was no part of the knight's intent.

"Therefore," said he ironically, "I hope you will be patient with my shortcomings. Nick, a chair for Master Godolphin and another cup. I bid you welcome to Penarrow."

A sneer flickered over the younger man's face.

"You pay me a compliment, sir, which I fear me 'tis not mine to return you."

"Time enough for that when I come to seek it," said Sir Oliver with easy, if assumed, good humor.

"When you come to seek it?"

"The hospitality of your house," Sir Oliver explained.

"It is on that very matter I am come to talk with you."

"Will you sit?" Sir Oliver invited him, and spread a hand toward the chair which Nicholas had set.

In the same gesture he waved the servant away.

Master Godolphin ignored the invitation.

"You were," he said, "at Godolphin Court but yesterday, I hear."

He paused, and as Sir Oliver offered no denial, he added stiffly—

"I am come, sir, to inform you that the honor of your visits is one we shall be happy to forego."

In the effort he made to preserve his self-control before so direct an affront Sir Oliver paled a little under his tan.

"You will understand, Peter," he replied slowly, "that you have said too much unless you add something more."

He paused, considering his visitor a moment.

"I do not know whether Rosamund has told you that yesterday she did me the honor to consent to become my wife."

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"She is a child that does not know her mind," broke in the other.

"Do you know of any good reason why she should come to change it?" asked Sir Oliver with a slight air of challenge.

Master Godolphin sat down, crossed his legs and placed his hat on his knee.

"I know a dozen," he answered. "But I need not urge them. Sufficient should it be to remind you that Rosamund is but seventeen and that she is under my guardianship and that of Sir John Killigrew. Neither Sir John nor I can sanction this bethrothal."

"Good lack!" broke out Sir Oliver. "Who asks your sanction or Sir John's? By God's grace your sister will grow to be a woman soon and mistress of herself. I am in no desperate haste to get me wed, and by nature —as you may be observing—I am a wondrous patient man. I'll even wait."

And he pulled at his pipe.

"Waiting can not avail you in this, Sir Oliver. 'Tis best you should understand. We are resolved, Sir John and I."

"Are you so? God's light! Send Sir John to me to tell me of his resolves, and I'll tell him something of mine. Tell him from me, Master Godolphin, that if he will trouble to come as far as Penarrow I'll do by him what the hangman should have done long since. I'll crop his ears for him, by this hand!"

"Meanwhile," said Master Godolphin whettingly, "will you not essay your rover's prowess upon me?"

"You?" quoth Sir Oliver, and looked him over with good-humored contempt. "I'm no butcher of fledgelings, my lad. Besides, you are your sister's brother, and 'tis no aim of mine to increase the obstacles already in my path."

Then his tone changed. He leaned across the table.

"Come, now Peter. What is at the root of all this matter? Can we not compose such differences as you conceive exist? Out with them! 'Tis no matter for Sir John. He's a curmudgeon who signifies not a finger's snap. But you, 'tis different. You are her brother. Out with your plaints, then! Let us be frank and friendly."

"Friendly?" The other sneered again. "Our fathers set us an example in that."

"Does it matter what our fathers did? More shame to them if, being neighbors, they could not be friends. Shall we follow so deplorable an ensample?"

"You'll not impute that the fault with *my* father!" cried the other, with a show of ready anger.

"I impute nothing, lad. I cry shame upon them both."

" 'Swounds!" swore Master Peter. "Do you malign the dead?"

"If I do, I malign them both. But I do not. I no more than condemn a fault that both must acknowledge could they return to life."

"Then, sir, confine your condemnings to your own father with whom no man of honor could have lived at peace."

"Softly, softly, good sir."

"There's no call to go softly. Ralph Tressilian was a dishonor, a scandal to the countryside. Not a hamlet between here and Truro, or between here and Helston, but swarms with big Tressilian noses like your own, in memory of your debauched parent."

Sir Oliver's eyes grew narrower; he smiled.

"I wonder how you came by your own nose?" he wondered.

Master Godolphin got to his feet in a passion, and his chair crashed over behind him.

"Sir," he blazed, "you insult my mother's memory!"

Sir Oliver laughed.

"I make a little free with it, perhaps, in return for your pleasantries on the score of my father."

Master Godolphin pondered him in speechless anger; then, swayed by his passion he leaned across the board, raised his long cane and struck Sir Oliver sharply on the shoulder.

That done, he strode off magnificently toward the door. Half-way thither he paused.

"I shall expect your friends and the length of your sword," said he.

Sir Oliver laughed again.

"I don't think I shall trouble to send them," said he.

Master Godolphin wheeled, fully to face him again.

"How? You will take a blow?"

Sir Oliver shrugged.

"None saw it given," said he.

"But I shall publish it abroad that I have caned you."

"You'll publish yourself a liar if you do; for none will believe you."

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Then he changed his tone yet again.

"Come, Peter, we are behaving unworthily. As for the blow, I confess that I deserved it. A man's mother is more sacred than his father. So we may cry quits on that score. Can we not cry quits on all else? What can it profit us to perpetuate a foolish quarrel that sprang up between our fathers?"

"There is more than that between us," answered Master Godolphin. "I'll not have my sister wed a pirate."

"A pirate? God's light! I am glad there's none to hear you, for since her Grace has knighted me for my doings upon the seas, your words go very near to treason. Surely, lad, what the queen approve Master Peter Godolphin may approve, and even your mentor Sir John Killigrew. You've been listening to him. 'Twas he sent you hither."

"I am no man's lackey," answered the other hotly, resenting the imputation—and resenting it the more because of the truth in it.

"To call me a pirate is to say a foolish thing. Hawkins, with whom I sailed, has also received the accolade, and who dubs us pirates insults the queen herself. Apart from that, which, as you see, is a very empty charge, what else have you against me? I am, I hope, as good as any other here in Cornwall; Rosamund honors me with her affection; and I am rich, and shall be richer still ere the wedding bells are heard."

"Rich with the fruit of thieving upon the seas, rich with the treasures of scuttled ships and the price of slaves captured in Africa and sold to the plantations, rich as the vampire is glutted—with the blood of dead men!"

"Does Sir John say that?" asked Sir Oliver in a soft, deadly voice.

"I say it."

"I heard you; but I am asking where you learnt that pretty lesson. Is Sir John your preceptor? He is, he is. No need to tell me. I'll deal with him. Meanwhile let me disclose to you the sure and disinterested source of Sir John's rancor. You shall see what an upright and honest gentleman is Sir John, who was your father's friend and has been your guardian."

"I'll not listen to what you say of him."

"Nay, but you shall, in return for having made me listen to what he says of me. Sir John desires to obtain a license to build at the mouth of the Fal. He hopes to see a town spring up above the haven there under the shadow of his own manor of Arwenack. He represents himself as nobly disinterested and all concerned for the prosperity of the country, and he neglects to mention that the land is his own and that it is his own prosperity and that of his family which he is concerned to foster. We met in London by a fortunate chance whilst Sir John was about his business at the Court.

"Now it happens that I, too, have interests in Truro and Penryn; but, unlike Sir John, I am honest in the matter, and proclaim it. If any growth should take place about Smithick it follows from its more advantageous situation that Truro and Penryn must suffer, and that suits me as little as the other matter would suit Sir John. I told him so, for I can be blunt, and I told the queen in the form of a counter-petition to Sir John's."

He shrugged.

"The moment was propitious to me. I was one of the seamen who had helped to conquer the unconquerable Armada of King Philip. I was therefore not to be denied, and Sir John was sent home as empty-handed as he went to court. D'ye marvel that he hates me? Knowing him for what he is, d'ye marvel that he dubs me pirate and worse?

"'Tis natural enough so to misrepresent my doings upon the sea, since it is those doings have afforded me the power to hurt his profit. He has chosen the weapons of calumny for this combat, but those weapons are not mine, as I shall show him this very day. If you do not credit what I say, come with me and be present at the little talk I hope to have with that curmudgeon."

"You forget," said Master Godolphin, "that I, too, have interests in the neighborhood of Smithick, and that you are hurting those."

"Soho!" crowed Sir Oliver. "Now at last the sun of truth peeps forth from all this cloud of righteous indignation at my bad Tressilian blood and pirate's ways! You, too, are but a trafficker. Now see what a fool am I to have believed you sincere, and to have stood here in talk with you as with an honest man."

His voice swelled, and his lip curled in a contempt that struck the other like a blow.

"I swear I had not wasted breath with you had I known you for so mean and pitiful a fellow."



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"These words—" began Master Godolphin, drawing himself up very stiffly.

"Are a deal less than your deserts," cut in the other, and he raised his voice to call—

"Nick!"

"You shall answer for them," snapped his visitor.

"I am answering now," was the stern answer. "To come here and prate to me of my dead father's dissoluteness and of an ancient quarrel between him and yours, to bleat of my trumped-up course of piracy and my own ways of life as a just cause why I may not wed your sister, whilst the real consideration in your mind, the real spur of your hostility is no more than the matter of some few paltry pounds a year that I hinder you from pocketing. A God's name, get you gone!"

Nick entered at that moment.

"You shall hear from me again, Sir Oliver," said the other, white with anger. "You shall account to me for these words."

"I do not fight with—with hucksters," flashed Sir Oliver.

"D'ye dare call me that?"

"Indeed, 'tis to discredit an honorable class, I confess it. Nick, the door for Master Godolphin."

## CHAPTER II

### ROSAMUND

ANON, after his visitor had departed, Sir Oliver grew calm again. Then being able in his calm to consider his position, he became angry anew at the very thought of the rage in which he had been, a rage which had so mastered him that he had erected additional obstacles to the already considerable ones that stood between Rosamund and himself. In full blast, his anger swung round and took Sir John Killigrew for its objective.

He bellowed for Nick and his boots.

"Where is Master Lionel?" he asked when the boots had been fetched.

"He be just ridden in, Sir Oliver."

"Bid him hither."

Promptly, in answer to that summons, came Sir Oliver's half-brother—a slender lad favoring his mother, the dissolute Ralph Tressilian's second wife. He was as unlike Sir Oliver in body as in soul. He was comely in a very gentle, almost womanish way; his complexion was fair and delicate, his hair golden, and his eyes of a deep blue. He had a very charming stripling grace—for he was but in his twenty-first year—and he dressed with all the care of a court gallant.

"Has that whelp Godolphin been to visit you?" he asked as he entered.

"Aye," growled Sir Oliver. "He came to tell me some things and to hear some others in return."

"Ha! I passed him just beyond the gates, and he was deaf to my greeting. 'Tis a most cursed, insufferable pip!"

"Art a judge of men, Lal."

Sir Oliver stood up booted.

"I am for Arwenack to exchange a compliment or two with Sir John."

His tight-pressed lips and resolute air supplemented his words so well that Lionel clutched his arm.

"You're not—you're not——"

"I am."

And affectionately, as if to soothe the lad's obvious alarm, he patted his brother's shoulder.

"Sir John," he explained, "talks too much. 'Tis a fault that wants correcting. I go to teach him the virtue of silence."

"There will be trouble, Oliver."

"So there will—for him. If a man must be saying of me that I am a pirate, a slave-dealer, a murderer, and Heaven alone knows what else, he must be ready for the consequences. But you are late, Lal. Where have you been?"

"I rode as far as Malpas."

"As far as Malpas?"

Sir Oliver's eyes narrowed, as was the trick with him.

"I hear it whispered what magnet draws you thither," he said. "Be wary, boy. You go too much to Malpas."

"How?" quoth Lionel a trifle coldly.

"I mean that you are your father's son. Remember it, and strive not to follow in his ways lest they bring you to his own end. I have just been reminded of these predilections of his by good Master Peter. Go not over often to Malpas, I say. No more."

But the arm which he flung about his younger brother's shoulders and the warmth of his embrace made resentment of his warning quite impossible.

When he was gone Lionel sat him down to dine with Nick to wait on him. He ate but little, and never addressed the old servant in the course of that brief repast. He was very pensive. In thought he followed

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his brother on that avenging visit of his to Arwenack. Killigrew was no babe, but a man of his hands, a soldier and a seaman. If any harm should come to Oliver——

He trembled at the thought; and then almost despite him his mind ran on to calculate the consequences to himself. His fortune would be in a very different case, he reflected. In a sort of horror, he sought to put so detestable a reflection from his mind; but it returned insistently.

All that he had he owed to his brother's bounty. That dissolute father of theirs had died as such men commonly die, leaving behind him heavily encumbered estates and many debts; the very house of Penarrow was mortgaged, and the moneys raised on it had been drunk, or gambled, or spent on one or another of Ralph Tressilian's many lights o' love.

Then Oliver had sold some little property near Helston, inherited from his mother; he had sunk the money into a venture upon the Spanish Main. He had fitted out and manned a ship, and had sailed with Hawkins upon one of those ventures, which Sir John Killigrew was perfectly entitled to account pirate raids. He had returned with enough plunder in specie and gems to disencumber the Tressilian patrimony. He had sailed again and returned still wealthier.

And meanwhile Lionel had remained at home taking his ease. He loved his ease. His nature was inherently indolent, and he had the wasteful, extravagant tastes that usually go with indolence. He was not born to toil and struggle, and none had sought to correct the shortcomings of his character in that respect.

Sometimes he wondered what the future might hold for him should Oliver come to marry. When his thoughts did turn to it in momentary uneasiness he would abruptly dismiss them with the reflection that when all was said Oliver loved him, and Oliver would never fail to provide adequately for all his wants.

In this undoubtedly he was fully justified. Oliver was more parent than brother to him. When their father had been brought home to die for the wound dealt him by an outraged husband—and a shocking spectacle that sinner's death had been with its hasty, terrified repentance—he had intrusted Lionel to his elder brother's care.

At the time Oliver was seventeen and Lionel twelve. But Oliver had seemed by so many years older than his age that the twice-widowed Ralph Tressilian had come to depend upon this steady, resolute, and masterful child of his first marriage. It was into his ear that the dying man had poured the wretched tale of his repentance for the life he had lived and the state in which he was leaving his affairs with such scant provision for his sons.

For Oliver he had no fear. His anxieties were all for Lionel, whom he also judged with that same penetrating insight vouchsafed a man in his last hours. Hence his piteous recommendation of him to Oliver, and Oliver's ready promise to be father, mother, and brother to the youngster.

All this was in Lionel's mind as he sat musing there, and again he struggled with that hideous insistent thought that if things should go ill with his brother at Arwenack, there would be great profit to himself; that these things he now enjoyed upon another's bounty he would then enjoy in his own right. A devil seemed to mock him with the whispered sneer that were Oliver to die his own grief would not be long-lived.

So wrought upon was he by the welter of his emotions, by that fierce strife between his conscience and his egotism, that he came abruptly to his feet, a cry upon his lips—

"*Vade retro, Sathanas!*"*

Old Nicholas, looking up abruptly, saw the lad's face, waxen, his brow bedewed with sweat.

"Master Lionel! Master Lionel!" he cried, his small, bright eyes concernedly scanning his young master's face.

"What be amiss?"

Lionel mopped his brow.

"Sir Oliver has gone to Arwenack upon a punitive business," said he.

"An' what be that, zur?" quoth Nicholas.

"He has gone to punish Sir John for having maligned him."

A grin spread upon the weather-beaten countenance of Nicholas.

"Be that so? Marry, 'twere time. Sir John he be over long i' th' tongue."

Lionel stood amazed at the man's easy confidence and supreme assurance of how his master must acquit himself.

"You—you have no fear, Nicholas——"

He did not add of what. But the servant understood, and his grin grew broader still.

"Fear? Lackaday! I bain't afeeard for

* "Get thee behind me, Satan."

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Sir Oliver, and doan't ee be afeeard. Sir Oliver'll be home to sup with a sharp-set appetite—'tis the only difference fighting ever made to he."

THE servant was justified of his confidence by the events, though through a slight error of judgment Sir Oliver did not quite accomplish all that he promised and intended. In anger, and when he deemed that he had been affronted, he was—as his chronicler never wearies of insisting—of a tigerish ruthlessness. He rode to Arwenack fully resolved to kill his calumniator. Nothing less would satisfy him.

Arrived at that fine embattled castle of the Killigrews which commanded the entrance to the estuary of the Fal, he found Peter Godolphin there before him; and because of Peter's presence Sir Oliver was more deliberate and formal in his accusation of Sir John than he had intended.

Sir John, however, came half-way to meet the quarrel. His rancor against the "Pirate of Penarrow"—as he had come to dub Sir Oliver—rendered him almost as eager to engage as was his visitor.

They found a secluded corner of the deer-park for their business, and there Sir John—a slim, sallow gentleman of some thirty years of age—made an onslaught with sword and dagger upon Sir Oliver, full worthy of the onslaught he had made earlier with his tongue. But his impetuosity availed him less than nothing. Sir Oliver was come there with a certain purpose, and it was his way that he never failed to carry through a thing to which he set his hand.

In three minutes it was all over, and Sir Oliver was carefully wiping his blade whilst Sir John lay coughing upon the turf tended by white-faced Peter Godolphin and a scared groom, who had been bidden thither to make up the necessary tale of witnesses.

Sir Oliver sheathed his weapons and resumed his coat, then came to stand over his fallen foe, considering him critically.

"I think I have silenced him for a little time only," he said. "And I confess that I intended to do better. I hope, however, that the lesson will suffice and that he will lie no more—at least concerning me."

"Do you mock a fallen man?" was Master Godolphin's angry protest.

"God forbid!" said Sir Oliver soberly. "There is no mockery in my heart. There is, believe me, nothing but regret—regret that I should not have done the thing more thoroughly. I will send assistance from the house as I go. Give you good day, Master Peter."

From Arwenack he rode round by Penryn on his homeward way. But he did not go straight home. He paused at the gates of Godolphin Court, which stood above Trefusis Point commanding the view of Carrick Roads. He turned in under the old gateway and drew up in the courtyard. Leaping to the kidney-stones that paved it, he announced himself a visitor to Mistress Rosamund.

He found her in her bower—a light, turreted chamber on the mansion's eastern side, with windows that looked out upon that lovely sheet of water and the wooded slopes beyond.

She rose with a little exclamation of gladness when he appeared under the lintel—scarce high enough to admit him without stooping—and stood regarding him across the room with brightened eyes and flushing cheeks.

Like her brother she was tawny headed and she was divinely tall, though as yet her figure in its girlishness was almost too slender for her height.

"I had not looked for you so early—" she was beginning, when she observed that his countenance was oddly stern.

"Why—what has happened?" she cried, her intuitions clamoring loudly of some mischance.

"Naught to alarm you, sweet; yet something that may vex you." He set an arm about that lissom waist of hers above the swelling farthingale, and gently led her back to her chair, then flung himself upon the window-seat beside her.

"You hold Sir John Killigrew in some affection?" he said between statement and inquiry.

"Why, yes. He was our guardian until my brother came of full age."

Sir Oliver made a wry face.

"Aye, there's the rub. Well, I've all but killed him."

She drew back into her chair, recoiling before him, and he saw horror leap to her eyes and blench her face. He made haste to explain the causes that had led to this; he told her briefly of the calumnies concerning him that Sir John had put about to vent his spite at having been thwarted in the

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matter of his coveted license to build at Smithick.

"That mattered little," he concluded. "I knew these tales concerning me were abroad, and I held them in the same contempt as I hold their utterer. But he went further, Rose; he poisoned your brother's mind against me, and he stirred up in him the slumbering rancor that in my father's time was wont to lie between our houses. Today Peter came to me with the clear intent to make a quarrel. He affronted me as no man has ever dared."

She cried out at that, her already great alarm redoubled. He smiled.

"Do not suppose that I could harm him. He is your brother, and, so, sacred to me. He came to tell me that no betrothal was possible between us, forbade me ever again to visit Godolphin Court, dubbed me pirate and vampire to my face and reviled my father's memory. I tracked the evil of all this to its source in Killigrew, and rode straight to Arwenack to dam that source of falsehood for all time. I did not accomplish quite so much as I intended. You see, I am frank, my Rose. It may be that Sir John will live; if so I hope that he may profit by this lesson. I have come straight to you," he concluded, "that you may hear the tale from me before another comes to malign me with false stories of this happening."

"You—you mean Peter?" she cried.

"Alas!" he sighed.

She sat very still and white, looking straight before her and not at all at Sir Oliver. At length she spoke.

"I am not skilled in reading men," she said in a sad, small voice. "How should I be, that am but a maid who has led a cloistered life? I was told of you that you were violent and passionate, a man of bitter enmities, easily stirred to hatreds, cruel and ruthless in the persecution of them."

"You, too, have been listening to Sir John," he muttered, and laughed shortly.

"All this was I told," she pursued as if he had not spoken, "and all did I refuse to believe because my heart was given to you. Yet—yet of what have you made proof today?"

He set himself to explain.

"I have told you what Sir John had done. I have told you that the greater part of it—and matter all that touched my honor—I know Sir John to have done long since. Yet I suffered it in silence and contempt. Was that to show myself easily stirred to ruthlessness? What was it but forbearance? When, however, he carries his petty huckster's rancor so far as to seek to choke for me my source of happiness in life and sends your brother to affront me, I am still so forbearing that I recognize your brother to be no more than a tool and go straight to the hand that wielded him. Because I know of your affection for Sir John I gave him such latitude as no man of honor in England would have given him."

Then seeing that she still avoided his regard, still sat in that frozen attitude of horror at learning that the man she loved had imbrued his hands with the blood of another whom she also loved, his pleading quickened to a warmer note.

"Rose," he cried, and his deep voice quivered with intercession, "dismiss all that you have heard from out your mind. Consider only this thing that has befallen. Suppose that Lionel my brother came to you, and that, having some measure of power and authority to support him, he swore to you that you should never wed me, swore to prevent this marriage because he deemed you such a woman as could not bear my name with honor to myself; and suppose that to all this he added insult to the memory of your dead father, what answer would you return him?"

Her eyes scanned now his face, every line of which was pleading to her and calling for impartial judgment. Her face grew troubled, and then almost fierce. She set her hands upon his shoulders, and looked deep into his eyes.

"You swear to me, Noll, that all is as you have told it me—you have added naught, you have altered naught to make the tale more favorable to yourself?"

"You need such oaths from me?" he asked, and she saw sorrow spread upon his countenance.

"If I did I should not love thee, Noll. But in such an hour I need your own assurance. Will you not be generous and bear with me, strengthen me to withstand anything that may be said hereafter?"

"As God's my witness, I have told you true in all," he answered solemnly.

"Then," she said, "I believe you acted rightly. I believe with you that no man of honor could have acted otherwise. I must believe you, Noll, for did I not, then I could

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believe in naught and hope for naught. I am content so you be true."

"True I shall ever be, sweetheart," he whispered fervently.

She looked at him again, and now she was smiling wistfully through her tears.

"And you will bear with Peter?" she implored him.

"He shall have no power to anger me," he answered. "I swear that too. Do you know that but today he struck me?"

"Struck you? You did not tell me that!"

"My quarrel was not with him but with the rogue that sent him. I laughed at the blow. Was he not sacred to me?"

"He is good at heart, Noll," she pursued. "In time he will come to love you as you deserve, and you will come to know that he, too, deserves your love."

"He deserves it now, for the love he bears to you."

"And you will think ever thus during the little while of waiting that perforce must lie before us?"

"I shall never think otherwise, sweet. Meanwhile I shall avoid him, and that no harm may come should he forbid me Godolphin Court I'll even stay away. In less than a year you will be of full age, and none may hinder you to come and go. What is a year, with such hope as mine to still impatience?"

She stroked his face.

"Art very gentle with me ever, Noll," she murmured fondly. "I cannot credit you are ever harsh to any, as they say."

"Heed them not," he answered her. "I may have been something of all that, but you have purified me, Rose. What man that loved you could be aught but gentle."

He kissed her, and stood up.

"I had best be going now," he said. "I shall walk along the shore toward Trefusis Point tomorrow morning. If you should chance to be similarly disposed——"

She laughed, and rose in her turn.

"I shall be there, dear Noll."

" 'Twere best so hereafter," he assured her, smiling, and so took his leave.

## CHAPTER III

### THE FORGE

SIR OLIVER'S wisdom in being the first to bear Rosamund the story of that day's happenings was established anon when Master Godolphin returned home. He went straight in quest of his sister; and in a frame of mind oppressed by fear and sorrow for Sir John, by his general sense of discomfiture at the hands of Sir Oliver and by the anger begotten of all this, he was harsh in manner and disposed to hector.

"Madam," he announced abruptly, "Sir John is like to die."

The answer she returned him did not tend to soothe his sorely ruffled spirit.

"I know," she said. "And I believe him to deserve no less. Who deals in calumny should be prepared for the wages of it."

He stared at her in long, furious silence, then exploded into oaths, and finally inveighed against her unnaturalness and pronounced her bewitched by that foul dog Tressilian.

"It is fortunate for me," she answered him composedly, "that he was here before you to give me the truth of this affair."

Then her assumed calm and the anger with which she had met his own all fell away from her.

"Oh, Peter, Peter," she cried in anguish, "I hope that Sir John will recover. I am distraught by this event. But be just, I implore you. Sir Oliver has told me how hard driven he had been."

"He shall be driven harder yet, as God's my life! If you think this deed shall go unpunished——"

She flung herself upon his breast and implored him to carry this quarrel no further. She spoke of her love for Sir Oliver, and announced her firm resolve to marry him in despite of all opposition that could be made, all of which did not tend to soften her brother's humor. Yet because of the love that ever had held these two in closest bonds he went so far in the end as to say that should Sir John recover he would not himself pursue the matter further. But if Sir John should die—as was very likely—honor compelled him to seek vengeance of a deed to which he had himself so very largely contributed.

"I read that man as if he were an open book," the boy announced, with callow boastfulness. "He has the subtlety of Satan, yet he does not delude me. It was at me he struck through Killigrew. Because he desires you, Rosamund, he could not—as he bluntly told me—deal with me however I provoked him, not even though I went the length to striking him. He might have killed me for't; but he knew that to do

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so would place a barrier 'twixt him and you. Oh, he is calculating as all the fiends of hell! So, to wipe out the dishonor which I did him, he shifts the blame of it upon Killigrew and goes out to kill him, which he further thinks may act as a warning to me. But if Killigrew dies——" And thus he rambled on, filling her gentle heart with anguish to see this feud increasing between the two men she loved best in all the world. If the outcome of it should be that either were to kill the other, she knew that she could never again look upon the survivor.

But Sir John Killigrew did not die. He hovered between this world and a better one for some seven days, at the end of which he began to recover. By October he was abroad again, gaunt and pale, reduced to half the bulk that had been his before, a mere shadow of a man.

One of his first visits was to Godolphin Court. He went to remonstrate with Rosamund upon her betrothal, and he did so at the request of her brother. But his remonstrances were strangely lacking in the force that she had looked for.

The odd fact is that in his near approach to death, and with his earthly interests dwindling, Sir John had looked matters frankly in the face, and had been driven to the conclusion—a conclusion impossible to him in normal health—that he had got no more than he deserved. He realized that he had acted unworthily, if unconscious at the time of the unworthiness of what he did; that the weapons with which he had fought Sir Oliver were not the weapons that become a gentleman or in which there is credit to be won.

Nevertheless in the hour of reaction he did not go so far as to admit that Sir Oliver Tressilian was a fit mate for Rosamund Godolphin. She and her brother had been placed in his care by their late father, and he had nobly discharged his tutelage until such time as Peter had come to full age. His affection for Rosamund was tender as that of a lover, but tempered by a feeling entirely paternal. He went very near to worshiping her, and when all was said, when he had cleared his mind of all dishonest bias, he still found overmuch to dislike in Oliver Tressilian, and the notion of his becoming Rosamund's husband was repellent.

Therefore, being whole again he went to remonstrate with her as he accounted it his duty and as Master Peter had besought him. Yet knowing the bias that had been his, he was careful to understate rather than to overstate his reasons.

"But, Sir John," she protested, "if every man is to be condemned for the sins of his forebears, but few could escape condemnation, and wherever shall you find me a husband deserving of your approval?"

"His father—" began Sir John.

"Tell me not of his father, but of himself," she interrupted.

He frowned impatiently—they were sitting in that bower of hers above the river.

"I was coming to't," he answered, a thought testily, for these interruptions which made him keep to the point robbed him of his best arguments. "However, suffice it that many of his father's vicious qualities he has inherited, as we see in his ways of life; that he has not inherited others only the future can assure us."

"In other words," she mocked him, yet very seriously, "I am to wait until he dies of old age to make quite sure that he has no such sins as must render him an unfitting husband?"

"No, no," he cried. "Good lack! What a perverseness is thine!"

"The perverseness is your own, Sir John. I am but the mirror of it."

He shifted in his chair and grunted.

"Be it so, then," he snapped. "We will deal with the qualities that already he displays." And Sir John enumerated them.

"But this is no more than your judgment of him—no more than what you think him."

" 'Tis what all the world thinks him."

"But I shall not marry a man for what others think of him, but for what I think of him myself. And in my view you cruelly malign him. I discover no such qualities in Sir Oliver."

" 'Tis that you should be spared such a discovery that I am beseeching you not to wed him."

"Yet unless I wed him I shall never make such a discovery; and until I make it I shall ever continue to love him and to desire to wed him. Is all my life to be spent so?"

She laughed outright, and came to stand beside him. With her hand she rubbed his brow.

"Why, here are wicked wrinkles of ill-humor," she cried to him. "You are all undone, and by a woman's wit, and you do not like it."

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"I am undone by a woman's wilfulness, by a woman's headstrong resolve not to see."

"You have naught to show me, Sir John."

"Naught? Is all that I have said naught?"

"Words are not things; judgments are not facts. You say that he is so, and so and so. But when I ask you upon what facts you judge him, your only answer is that you think him to be what you say he is. Your thoughts may be honest, Sir John, but your logic is contemptible."

And she laughed again at his gaping discomfiture.

"Come, now, deal like an honest upright judge, and tell me one act of his—one thing that he has ever done and of which you have sure knowledge—that will bear him out to be what you say he is. Now, Sir John!"

He looked up at her impatiently. Then, at last, he smiled.

"Rogue!" he cried—and upon a distant day he was to bethink him of those words. "If ever he be brought to judgment I can desire him no better advocate than thou."

Thereupon following up her advantage swiftly, she kissed him.

"Nor could I desire him a more honest judge than you."

What was the poor man to do thereafter? What he did. Live up to her pronouncement, and go forthwith to visit Sir Oliver and compose their quarrel.

THE acknowledgment of his fault was handsomely made, and Sir Oliver received it in a spirit no less handsome. But when Sir John came to the matter of Mistress Rosamund he was, out of his sense of duty to her, less generous. He announced that since he could not bring himself to look upon Sir Oliver as a suitable husband for her, nothing that he had now said must mislead Sir Oliver into supposing him a consenting party to any such union.

"But that," he added, "is not to say that I oppose it. I disapprove, but I stand aside. Until she is of full age her brother will refuse his sanction. After that, the matter will concern neither him nor myself."

"I hope," said Sir Oliver, "he will take as wise a view. But whatever view he takes will be no matter. For the rest, Sir John, I thank you for your frankness, and I rejoice to know that if I may not count you for my friend, at least I need not reckon you among my enemies."

But if Sir John was thus won round to a neutral attitude, Master Peter's rancor abated nothing; rather it increased each day, and presently there came another matter to feed it, a matter of which Sir Oliver had no suspicion.

He knew that his brother Lionel rode almost daily to Malpas, and he knew the object of those daily rides. He knew of the lady who kept a sort of court there for the rustic bucks of Truro, Penryn and Helston, and he knew something of the ill-repute that had attached to her in town—a repute, in fact, which had been the cause of her withdrawal into the country. He told his brother some frank and ugly truths concerning her, by way of warning him, and therein, for the first time the twain went very near to quarrelling.

After that he mentioned her no more. He knew that in his indolent way Lionel could be headstrong, and he knew human nature well enough to be convinced that interference here would but set a breach between himself and his brother without in the least achieving its real object. So Oliver shrugged resignedly, and held his peace.

There he left the affair, nor ever spoke again of Malpas and the siren who presided there. And meanwhile the Autumn faded into Winter, and with the coming of stormy weather Sir Oliver and Rosamund had fewer opportunities of meeting. To Godolphin Court he would not go since she did not desire it; and himself he deemed it best to remain away since otherwise he must risk a quarrel with its master, who had forbidden him the place. In those days he saw Peter Godolphin but little, and on the rare occasions when they did meet they passed each other with a very meager salute.

One day, a week from Christmas, he had occasion to ride to Helston on some trifling affair. For half a week a blizzard had whirled about the coast, and he had been kept chafing indoors what time layer upon layer of snow was spread upon the countryside. On the fourth day, the storm being spent, the sun came forth, the skies were swept clear of clouds and all the countryside lay robed in a sun-drenched dazzling whiteness. Sir Oliver called for his horse and rode forth alone through the crisp snow. He turned homeward very early in the afternoon, but when a couple of miles from Helston he found that his horse had cast a shoe.

He dismounted, and bridle over arm

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tramped on through the sunlit vale between the heights of Pendennis and Arwenack, singing as he went. He came thus to Smithick and the door of the forge. About it stood a group of fishermen and rustics, for, in the absence of any inn just there, this forge was ever a point of congregation. In addition to the rustics and an itinerant merchant with his pack-horses, there were present Sir Andrew Flack, the parson from Penryn, and Master Gregory Baine, one of the justices from the neighborhood of Truro. Both were well-known to Sir Oliver and he stood in friendly gossip with them what time he waited for his horse.

It was all very unfortunate, from the casting of that shoe to the meeting with those gentlemen; for as Sir Oliver stood there, down the gentle slope from Arwenack rode Master Peter Godolphin.

It was said afterward by Sir Andrew and Master Baine that Master Peter appeared to have been carousing, so flushed was his face, so unnatural the brightness of his eye, so thick his speech and so extravagant and foolish what he said. He was of those who turn quarrelsome in wine—which is but another way of saying that when the wine was in and the restraint out, his natural humor came uppermost untrammeled. The sight of Sir Oliver standing there gave the lad precisely what he needed to indulge that evil humor of his, and he may have been quickened in his purpose by the presence of those other gentlemen. In his half-fuddled state of mind he may have recalled that once he had struck Sir Oliver and Sir Oliver had laughed and told him that none would believe it.

He drew rein suddenly as he came abreast of the group, so suddenly that he pulled his horse until it almost sat down like a cat; yet he retained his saddle. Then he came through the snow that was all squelched and muddied just about the forge, and leered at Sir Oliver.

"I am from Arwenack," he announced unnecessarily. "We have been talking of you."

"You could have had no better subject of discourse," said Sir Oliver, smiling, for all that his eyes were hard and something scared—though his fears did not concern himself.

"Marry, you are right; you make an engrossing topic—you and your debauched father."

"Sir," replied Sir Oliver, "once already have I deplored your mother's utter want of discretion."

The words were out of him in a flash under the spur of the gross insult flung at him, uttered in the momentary blind rage aroused by that inflamed and taunting face above him. No sooner were they sped than he repented them, the more bitterly because they were greeted by a guffaw from the rustics. He would have given half his fortune in that moment to have recalled them.

Master Godolphin's face had changed as utterly as if he had removed a mask. From flushed that it had been it was livid now and the eyes were blazing, the mouth twitching. Thus a moment he glowered upon his enemy. Then standing in his stirrups he swung aloft his whip.

"You dog!" he cried, in a snarling sob. "You dog!" And his lash came down and cut a long red wheal across Sir Oliver's dark face.

With cries of dismay and anger the others, the parson, the justice and the rustics got between the pair, for Sir Oliver was looking very wicked, and all the world knew him for a man to be feared.

"Master Godolphin, I cry shame upon you," exclaimed the parson. "If evil comes I shall testify to the grossness of your aggression. Get you gone from here!"

"Go to the devil, sir," said Master Godolphin thickly. "Is my mother's name to be upon the lips of that bastard? By God, man, the matter rests not here. He shall send his friends to me, or I will horsewhip him every time we meet. You hear, Sir Oliver?"

Sir Oliver made him no reply.

"You hear?" he roared. "There is no Sir John Killigrew this time upon whom you can shift the quarrel. Come you to me and get the punishment of which that whip-lash is but an earnest."

Then with a thick laugh he drove spurs into his horse's flanks, so furiously that he all but sent the parson and another sprawling.

"Stay but a little while for me," roared Sir Oliver after him. "You'll ride no more, my drunken fool!"

And in a rage he bellowed for his horse, flinging off the parson and Master Baine who endeavored to detain and calm him. He vaulted to the saddle when the nag was

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brought him, and whirled away in furious pursuit.

The parson looked at the justice and the justice shrugged, his lips tight-pressed.

"The young fool is drunk," said Sir Andrew, shaking his white head. "He's in no case to meet his Maker."

"Yet he seems very eager," quoth Master Justice Baine. "I doubt I shall hear more of the matter."

## CHAPTER IV

### THE INTERVENER

THE parson had notions of riding after Sir Oliver, and begged Master Baine to join him. But the justice looked down his long nose and opined that no good purpose was to be served; that Tressilians were ever wild and bloody men; and that an angry Tressilian was a thing to be avoided. The pedler deemed them a couple of madmen, whose ways were beyond the understanding of a sober citizen. The others—the fishermen and the rustics—had not the means to follow even had they had the will.

They dispersed to put abroad the news of that short, furious quarrel and to prophesy that blood would be let in the adjusting of it. This prognostication they based entirely upon their knowledge of the short Tressilian way. But it was a matter in which they were entirely wrong. It is true that Sir Oliver went galloping along that road that follows the Penryn River and that he pounded over the bridge in the town of Penryn in Master Godolphin's wake with murder in his heart. Men who saw him riding wildly thus with the red wheal across his white furious face said that he looked a very devil.

He crossed the bridge at Penryn, a half-hour after sunset, as dusk was closing into night, and it may be that the sharp, frosty air had a hand in the cooling of his blood. For as he reached the river's eastern bank he slackened his breakneck pace, even as he slackened the angry galloping of his thoughts. The memory of that oath he had sworn three months ago to Rosamund smote him like a physical blow. It checked his purpose; and, reflecting this, his pace fell to an amble. He shivered to think how near he had gone to wrecking all the happiness that lay ahead of him.

What was a boy's whip-lash, that his resentment of it should set all his future life in jeopardy? Even though men should call him a coward for submitting to it and leaving the insult unavenged, what should that matter? Moreover, upon the body of him who did so proclaim him he could brand the lie of a charge so foolish.

A mile or so below Penryn, he turned up the road that ran down to the ferry there, and took his way home over the shoulder of the hill with a slack rein. It was not his usual way. He was wont ever to go round by Trefusis Point that he might take a glimpse at the walls of the house that harbored Rosamund and a glance at the window of her bower. But tonight he thought the shorter road over the hill would be the safer way. If he went by Godolphin Court he might chance to meet Peter again, and his past anger warned him against courting such a meeting, warned him to avoid it lest evil should betide. Indeed, so imperious was the warning, and such were his fears of himself after what had just passed, that he resolved to leave Penarrow on the next day.

Whither he would go he did not then determine. He might repair to London, and he might even go upon another cruise—an idea which he had lately dismissed under Rosamund's earnest intercession. But it was imperative that he should quit the neighborhood, and place a distance between Peter Godolphin and himself until such time as he might take Rosamund to wife.

The resolve was firmly implanted in him by the time he reached Penarrow, and he felt himself uplifted by it and by the promise it afforded him that thus his future happiness would be assured.

Himself he stabled his horse; for of the two grooms he kept, one had by his leave set out yesterday to spend Christmas in Devon with his parents, the other had taken a chill and had been ordered to bed that very day by Sir Oliver, who was considerate with those that served him.

In the dining-room he found supper spread, and a great log fire blazed in the enormous cowled fireplace, diffusing a pleasant warmth through the vast room and flickering ruddily upon the trophies of weapons that adorned the walls, upon the tapestries and the portraits of dead Tressilians. Hearing his step, old Nicholas entered bearing a great candlebranch which he set upon the table.

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"You'm late, Sir Oliver," said the servant, "and Master Lionel bain't home yet neither."

Sir Oliver grunted and scowled as he crunched a log and set it sizzling under his wet heel. He thought of Malpas and cursed Lionel's folly, as, without a word, he loosed his cloak and flung it on an oaken coffer by the wall where already he had cast his hat. Then he sat down, and Nicholas came forward to draw off his boots.

When that was done and the old servant stood up again, Sir Oliver shortly bade him to serve supper.

"Master Lionel can not be long now," said he. "And give me to drink, Nick. 'Tis what I most require."

"I've brewed ee a posset o' canary sack," announced Nicholas; "there'm no better supping o' a frosty Winter's night, Sir Oliver."

He departed to return presently with a black jack that was steaming fragrantly. He found his master still in the same attitude, staring at the fire, and frowning darkly. Sir Oliver's thoughts were still of his brother and Malpas, and so insistent were they that his own concerns were for the moment quite neglected; he was considering whether it was not his duty, after all, to attempt a word of remonstrance. At length he rose with a sigh and got to table. There he bethought him of his sick groom, and asked Nicholas for news of him. Nicholas reported the fellow to be much as he had been, whereupon Sir Oliver took up a cup and brimmed it with the steaming posset.

"Take him that," he said. "There's no better medicine for such an ailment."

Outside fell a clatter of hooves.

"Here be Master Lionel at last," said the servant.

"No doubt," agreed Sir Oliver. "No need to stay for him. Here is all he needs. Carry that to Tom ere it cools."

It was his object to procure the servant's absence when Lionel should arrive, resolved as he was to greet him with a sound rating for his folly.

He took a deep draft of the posset, and as he set it down he heard Lionel's step without. Then the door was flung open, and his brother stood on the threshold a moment at gaze.

Sir Oliver looked round with a scowl, the well-considered reproof already on his lips.

"So—" he began, and got no further.

The sight that met his eyes drove the ready words from his lips and mind; instead it was with a sharp gasp of dismay that he came immediately to his feet.

"Lionel!"

Lionel lurched in, closed the door, and shot home one of its bolts. Then he leaned against it, facing his brother again. He was deathly pale, with great dark stains under his eyes; his ungloved right hand was pressed to his side, and the fingers of it were all smeared with blood that was still oozing and dripping from between them. Over his yellow doublet on the right side there was a spreading dark stain whose nature did not intrigue Sir Oliver a moment.

"My God!" he cried, and ran to his brother.

"What's happened, Lal? Who has done this?"

"Peter Godolphin," came the answer from lips that writhed in a curious smile.

Never a word said Sir Oliver, but he set his teeth and clenched his hands until the nails cut into his palms. Then he put an arm about this lad he loved above all save one in the whole world, and with anguish in his mind he supported him forward to the fire. There Lionel dropped to the chair that Sir Oliver had lately occupied.

"What is your hurt, lad? Has it gone deep?" he asked, in terror almost.

"'Tis naught—a flesh wound; but I have lost a mort of blood. I thought I should have been drained or ever I got me home."

With fearful speed Sir Oliver drew his dagger and ripped away doublet, vest, and shirt, laying bare the lad's white flesh. A moment's examination, and he breathed more freely.

"Art a very babe, Lal," he cried in his relief. "To ride without thought to stanch so simple a wound, and so lose all this blood —bad Tressilian blood though it be."

He laughed in the immensity of his reaction from that momentary terror.

"Stay thou there whilst I call Nick to help us dress this scratch."

"No, no!" There was note of sudden fear in the lad's voice, and his hand clutched at his brother's sleeve. "Nick must not know. None must know, or I am undone else."

Sir Oliver stared, bewildered. Lionel smiled again that curious twisted, rather frightened smile.

"I gave better than I took, Noll," said he.

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"Master Godolphin is as cold by now as the snow on which I left him."

His brother's sudden start and the fixed stare from out of his slowly paling face scared Lionel a little. He observed, almost subconsciously, the dull red wheal that came into prominence as the color faded out of Sir Oliver's face, yet never thought to ask how it came there. His own affairs possessed him too completely.

"What's this?" quoth Oliver at last, hoarsely.

Lionel dropped his eyes, unable longer to meet a glance that was becoming terrible.

"He would have it," he growled almost sullenly, answering the reproach that was written in every line of his brother's taut body. "I had warned him not to cross my path. But tonight I think some madness had seized upon him. He affronted me, Noll; he said things which it was beyond human power to endure, and——"

He shrugged to complete his sentence.

"Well, well," said Oliver in a small voice. "First let us tend this wound of yours."

"Do not call Nick," was the other's swift admonition. "Don't you see, Noll?" he explained in answer to the inquiry of his brother's stare, "don't you see that we fought there almost in the dark and without witnesses. It—" he swallowed—"it will be called murder, fair fight though it was; and should it be discovered that it was I——"

He shivered and his glance grew wild; his lips twitched.

"I see," said Oliver, who understood at last, and he added bitterly, "You fool!"

"I had no choice," protested Lionel. "He came at me with his drawn sword. Indeed, I think he was half-drunk. I warned him of what must happen to the other did either of us fall, but he bade me not concern myself with the fear of any such consequences to himself. He was full of foul words of me and you and all who ever bore our name. He struck me with the flat of his blade and threatened to run me through as I stood unless I drew to defend my self. What choice had I? I did not mean to kill him—as God's my witness, I did not, Noll."

WITHOUT a word Oliver turned to a side-table, where stood a metal basin and ewer. He poured water, then came in the same silence to treat his brother's wound. The tale that Lionel told made blame impossible, at least from Oliver.

When he had washed the wound he fetched some table-linen from a press and ripped it into strips with his dagger; he threaded out one of these and made a preliminary crisscross of the threads across the lips of the wound—for the blade had gone right through the muscles of the breast, grazing the ribs; these threads would help the formation of a clot. Then with the infinite skill and cunning acquired in the course of his rovings he proceeded to the bandaging.

That done, he opened the window and flung out the blood-tinted water. The cloths with which he had mopped the wound and all other similar evidences of the treatment he cast upon the fire. He must remove all traces even from the eyes of Nicholas. He had the most implicit trust in the old servant's fidelity. But the matter was too grave to permit of the slightest risk. He realized fully the justice of Lionel's fears that however fair the fight might have been, a thing done thus in secret must be accounted murder by the law.

Bidding Lionel wrap himself in his cloak, Sir Oliver unbarred the door, and went up-stairs in quest of a fresh shirt and doublet for his brother. On the landing he met Nicholas descending. He held him a moment in talk of the sick man above, and outwardly at least he was now entirely composed. He dispatched him up-stairs again upon a trumped-up errand that must keep him absent for some little time, whilst himself he went to get the things he needed.

He returned below with them, and when he had assisted his brother into fresh garments with as little movement as possible so as not to disturb his dressing of the wound or set it bleeding afresh, he took the blood-stained doublet, vest, and shirt which he had ripped and flung them, too, into the great fire.

When some moments later Nicholas entered the vast room he found the brothers sitting composedly at table. Had he faced Lionel he would have observed little amiss with him beyond the deep pallor of his face. But he did not even do so much. Lionel sat with his back to the door, and the servant's advance into the room was checked by Sir Oliver with the assurance that they did not require him. Nicholas withdrew again, and the brothers were once more alone.

Lionel ate very sparingly. He thirsted

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and would have emptied the measure of posset, but that Sir Oliver restrained him, and refused him anything but water lest he should contract a fever. Such a sparing meal as they made—for neither had much appetite—was made in silence. At last Sir Oliver rose, and with slow, heavy steps, suggestive of his humor, he crossed to the fireplace. He threw fresh logs on the blaze, and took from the tall mantelshelf his pipe and a leaden jar of tobacco. He filled the pipe pensively, then with the short iron tongs seized a fragment of glowing wood and applied it to the herb.

He returned to the table, and standing over his brother, he broke at last the silence that had now endured some time.

"What," he asked gruffly, "was the cause of your quarrel?"

Lionel started and shrank a little; between finger and thumb he kneaded a fragment of bread, his eyes upon it.

"I scarce know," he replied.

"Lal, that is not the truth."

"How?"

" 'Tis not the truth. I am not to be put off with such an answer. Yourself you said that you had warned him not to cross your path. What path was in your mind?"

Lionel leaned his elbows on the table and took his head in his hands.

" 'Twas that wanton at Malpas was the cause of all," he complained.

Sir Oliver's eye flashed at the words.

"I deemed her quite other; I was a fool, a fool! I—" he choked, and a sob shook him—"I thought she loved me. I would have married her, I would so, by God!"

Sir Oliver swore softly under his breath.

"I believed her pure and good, and—" He checked. "After all, who am I to say even now that she was not? 'Twas no fault of hers. 'Twas he, that foul dog Godolphin, who perverted her. Until he came all was well between us. And then——"

"I see," said Sir Oliver quietly. "I think you have something for which to thank him, if he revealed to you the truth of that strumpet's nature. I would have warned thee, lad. But— Perhaps I have been weak in that."

"It was not so; it was not she——"

"I say it was, and if I say so I am to be believed, Lionel. I'd smirch no woman's reputation without just cause. Be very sure of that."

Lionel stared up at him.

"O God!" he cried presently. "I know not what to believe. I am a shuttlecock flung this way and that way."

"Believe me," said Sir Oliver grimly. "And set all doubts to rest." Then he smiled. "So that was the virtuous Master Peter's secret pastime, eh? The hypocrisy of man! There is no plumbing the endless depths of it!"

He laughed outright, remembering all the things that Master Peter had said of Ralph Tressilian—delivering himself as though he were some chaste and self-denying anchorite. Then on that laugh he caught his breath quite suddenly.

"Would she know?" he asked fearfully. "Would that harlot know, would she suspect that 'twas your hand did this?"

"Aye—would she," replied the other. "I told her tonight when she flouted me and spoke of him, that I went straight to find him and pay the score between us. I was on my way to Godolphin Court when I came upon him in the park."

"Then you lied to me again, Lionel. For you said 'twas he attacked you."

"And so he did," Lionel countered instantly. "He never gave me time to speak, but flung down from his horse and came at me snarling like a cross-grained mongrel. Oh, he was as ready for the fight as I—as eager."

"But the woman at Malpas knows," said Sir Oliver gloomily. "And if she tells——"

"She'll not," cried Lionel. "She dare not for her reputation's sake."

"Indeed, I think you are right," agreed his brother with relief. "She dare not for other reasons, when I come to think of it. Her reputation is already such, and so well detested is she that were it known she had been the cause, however indirect, of this, the countryside would satisfy certain longings that it entertains concerning her. You are sure none saw you either going or returning?"

"None."

Sir Oliver strode the length of the room and back, pulling at his pipe.

"All should be well, then, I think," said he at last. "You were best abed. I'll carry you thither."

He took up his stripling brother in his powerful arms and bore him upstairs as though he were a babe. When he had seen him safely disposed for slumber, he returned below, shut the door of the hall, drew up

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the great oaken chair to the fire, and sat there far into the night smoking and thinking.

He rose up at last, cursing that wanton at Malpas who had come to fling this fresh and terrible difficulty where already he had to face so many. He stood leaning upon the overmantel, his foot upon one of the dogs of the fender, and considered what to do. He must bear his burden in silence, that was all. He must keep this secret even from Rosamund. It split his heart to think that he must practise this deceit with her. But naught else was possible short of relinquishing her, and that was far beyond his strength.

The resolve adopted, he took up a taper and went off to bed.

## CHAPTER V

### THE BUCKLER

IT WAS old Nicholas who brought the news next morning to the brothers as they were breaking their fast.

Lionel should have kept his bed that day; but dared not, lest the fact should arouse suspicion. He had a little fever, the natural result both of his wound and of his loss of blood; he was inclined to welcome rather than deplore it, since it set a flush on cheeks that otherwise must have looked too pale.

So leaning upon his brother's arm he came down to a breakfast of herrings and small ale before the tardy sun of that December morning was well risen.

Nicholas burst in upon them with a white face and shaking limbs. He gasped out his tale of the event in a voice of terror, and both brothers affected to be shocked, dismayed and incredulous. But the worst part of the old man's news, the true cause of his terrible agitation, was yet to be announced.

"And they do zay," he cried with anger quivering through his fear, "they do zay that it were you that killed he, Sir Oliver!"

"I?" quoth Sir Oliver, staring, and suddenly like a flood there burst upon his mind a hundred reasons, overlooked until this moment, that inevitably must urge the countryside to this conclusion, and to this conclusion only.

"Where heard you that foul lie?"

In the tumult of his mind he never heeded what answer was returned by Nicholas. There was one course to take, and he must take it instantly—as he had taken it once before in like case. He must straight to Rosamund to forestall the tale that others would carry to her. God send he did not come too late already.

He stayed for no more than to get his boots and hat, then to the stables for a horse, and he was away over the short mile that divided Penarrow from Godolphin Court, going by bridle track and meadow straight to his goal. He met none until he fetched up in the courtyard at Godolphin Court. Thence a babble of excited voices had reached him as he approached. But at sight of him there fell a general silence, ominous and staring. A dozen men or more were assembled there, and their eyes considered him first with amazement and curiosity, then with sullen anger.

He leaped down from his saddle, and stood a moment waiting for one of the three Godolphin grooms he had perceived in that assembly to take his reins. Seeing that none stirred——

"How now?" he cried. "Does no one wait here? Hither, sirrah, and hold my horse."

The groom addressed hesitated a moment, then, under the stare of Sir Oliver's hard, commanding eye, he shuffled sullenly forward to do as he was bid. A murmur ran through the group. Sir Oliver flashed a glance upon it, and every tongue trembled into silence.

In that silence he strode up the steps, and entered the rush-strewn hall. As he vanished he heard the hubbub behind him break out anew, fiercer than it had been before. But he nothing heeded it.

He found himself face to face with a servant, who shrank before him, staring as those in the courtyard had stared. His heart sank. It was plain that he came a little late already; that the tale had got there ahead of him.

"Where is your mistress?" said he.

"I—I will tell her you are here, Sir Oliver," the man replied in a voice that faltered; and he passed through a doorway on the right.

Sir Oliver stood a moment tapping his boots with his whip, his face pale, a deep line between his brows. Then the man reappeared, closing the door after him.

"Mistress Rosamund bids you depart, sir. She will not see you."

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A moment Sir Oliver scanned the servant's face—or appeared to scan it, for it is doubtful if he saw the fellow at all. Then for only answer he strode toward the door from which the man had issued. The servant set his back to it, his face resolute.

"Sir Oliver, my mistress will not see you."

"Out of my way!" he muttered in his angry, contemptuous fashion, and as the man persistent in his duty stood his ground, Sir Oliver took him by the breast of his jacket, heaved him aside and went in.

She was standing in mid-apartment, dressed by an odd irony all in bridal white, that yet was not as white as was her face. Her eyes like two black stains, solemn and haunting as they fastened upon this intruder who would not be refused. Her lips parted, but she had no word for him. She just stared in a horror that routed all his audacity and checked the masterfulness of his advance. At last he spoke.

"I see that you have heard," said he, "the lie that runs the countryside. That is evil enough. But I see that you have lent an ear to it; and that is worse."

She continued to regard him with a cold look of loathing.

"Rosamund!" he cried, and approached her by another step. "Rosamund! I am here to tell you that it is a lie."

"You had best go," she said, and her voice had in it a quality that made him tremble.

"Go?" he echoed stupidly. "You bid me go? You will not hear me?"

"I consented to hear you more than once; refused to hear others who knew better than I, and was heedless of their warnings. There is no more to be said between us. I pray God that they may take and hang you."

He was white to the lips, and for the first time in his life he knew fear and felt his great limbs trembling under him.

"They may hang me and welcome since you believe this thing. They could not hurt me more than you are doing, nor by hanging me could they deprive me of aught I value, since your faith in me is a thing to be blown upon by the first rumor of the countryside."

He saw the pale lips twist themselves into a dreadful smile.

"There is more than rumor, I think," said she. "There is more than all your lies will ever serve to cloak."

"My lies?" he cried. "Rosamund, I swear to you by my honor that I have had no hand in the slaying of Peter. May God rot me where I stand if this be not true!"

"It seems," said a harsh voice behind him, "that you fear God as little as aught else."

He wheeled sharply to confront Sir John Killigrew, who had entered after him.

"So," he said slowly, and his eyes grew hard and bright as agates, "this is your work."

And he waved a hand toward Rosamund. It was plain to what he alluded.

"My work?" quoth Sir John.

He closed the door, and advanced into the room.

"Sir, it seems your audacity, your shamelessness transcends all bounds. Your——"

"Have done with that," Sir Oliver interrupted him, and smote his great fist upon the table.

He was suddenly swept by a gust of passion.

"Leave words to fools, Sir John, and criticisms to those that can defend them better."

"Aye, you talk like a man of blood. You come hectoring it here in the very house of the dead—in the very house upon which you have cast this blight of sorrow and murder——"

"Have done, I say, or murder there will be!"

His voice was a roar, his mien terrific. And bold man though Sir John was, he recoiled. Instantly Sir Oliver had conquered himself again. He swung to Rosamund.

"Ah, forgive me!" he pleaded. "I am mad—stark mad with anguish at the thing imputed. I have not loved your brother, it is true. But as I swore to you, so have I done. I have taken blows from him, and smiled; but yesterday in a public place he affronted me, lashed me across the face with his riding-whip, as I still bear the mark. The man who says I were not justified in having killed him for it is a liar and a hypocrite. Yet the thought of you, Rosamund, the thought that he was your brother sufficed to quench the rage in which he left me. And now that by some grim mischance he has met his death, my recompense for all my patience, for all my thought for you is that I am charged with slaying him, and that you believe this charge."

"She has no choice," rasped Killigrew.

"Sir John," he cried, "I pray you do not

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meddle with her choice. That you believe it, marks you for a fool, and a fool's counsel is a rotten staff to lean upon at any time. Why God o' mercy! Assume that I desired to take satisfaction for the affront he had put upon me; do you know so little of men, and of me of all men, that you suppose I should go about my vengeance in this hole-and-corner fashion to set a hangman's noose about my neck? A fine vengeance that, as God lives!

"Was it so I dealt with you, Sir John, when you permitted your tongue to wag too freely, as you have yourself confessed? Heaven's light, man! Take a proper view; consider was this matter likely. I take it you are a more fearsome antagonist than was ever poor Peter Godolphin, yet when I sought satisfaction of you I sought it boldly and openly, as is my way. When we measured swords in your park at Arwenack we did so before witnesses in proper form, that the survivor might not be troubled with the justices. You know me well, and what manner of man I am with my weapons. Should I not have done the like by Peter if I had sought his life? Should I not have sought it in the same open fashion, and so killed him at my pleasure and leisure, and without risk or reproach from any?"

Sir John was stricken thoughtful. But whilst he stood frowning and perplexed at the end of that long tirade, it was Rosamund who gave Sir Oliver his answer.

"You ran no risk of reproach from any, do you say?"

He turned and was abashed. He knew the thought that was running in her mind.

"You mean," he said slowly, gently, his accents charged with reproachful incredulity, "that I am so base and false that I could in this fashion do what I dared not for your sake do openly? 'Tis what you mean. Rosamund! I burn with shame for you that you can think such thoughts of one whom—whom you professed to love."

Her coldness fell from her. Under the lash of his bitter, half-scornful accents her anger mounted, whelming for a moment even her anguish in her brother's death.

"You false deceiver!" she cried. "There are those who heard you vow his death. Your very words have been reported to me. And from where he lay they found a trail of blood upon the snow that ran to your own door. Will you still lie?"

They saw the color leave his face. They saw his arms drop limply to his sides, and his eyes dilate with obvious, sudden fear.

"A—a trail of blood?" he faltered stupidly.

"Aye, answer that!" cut in Sir John, fetched suddenly from out his doubts by that reminder.

Sir Oliver turned upon Killigrew again.

"I can not answer it," he said, but very firmly, in a tone that brushed aside all implications. "If you say it was so, so it must have been. Yet when all is said, what does it prove? Does it set it beyond doubt that it was I who killed him? Does it justify the woman who loved me to believe me a murderer and something worse?"

He paused, and looked at her again, a world of reproach in his glance.

"Can you suggest what else it proves, sir?" quoth Sir John, and there was doubt in his voice.

Sir Oliver caught the note of it, and a sob broke from him.

"O God of pity!" he cried out. "There is doubt in your voice, and there is none in hers. You were my enemy once, and have since been in a mistrustful truce with me, yet you can doubt that I did this thing. But she—she who loved me has no room for any doubt!"

"Sir Oliver," she answered him, "the thing you have done has broken quite my heart. Yet knowing all the taunts by which you were brought to such a deed I could have forgiven it, I think, even though I could no longer be your wife; I could have forgiven it, I say, but for the baseness of your present denial."

He looked at her, white-faced an instant, then turned on his heel and made for the door. There he paused.

"Your meaning is quite plain," said he. "It is your wish that I shall take my trial for this deed."

He laughed.

"Who will accuse me to the justices? Will you, Sir John?"

"If Mistress Rosamund so desires me," replied the knight.

"Ha! Be it so. But do not think I am the man to suffer myself to be sent to the gallows upon such paltry evidence as satisfies that lady. If any accuser comes to bleat of a trail of blood reaching to my door, and of certain words I spoke yesterday in anger, I will take my trial—but it shall be trial by battle upon the body of my accuser. That

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is my right, and I will have every ounce of it. Do you doubt how God will pronounce? I call upon Him solemnly to pronounce between me and such an one. If I am guilty of this thing may He wither my arm when I enter the lists."

"Myself I will accuse you," came Rosamund's dull voice. "And if you will, you may claim your rights against me, and butcher me as you butchered him."

"God forgive you, Rosamund!" said Sir Oliver, and went out.

HE returned home with hell in his heart. He knew not what the future might hold in store for him; but such was his resentment against Rosamund that there was no room in his bosom for despair. They should not hang him. He would fight them tooth and claw, and yet Lionel should not suffer. He would take care of that. And then the thought of Lionel changed his mood a little. How easily could he have shattered their accusation, how easily have brought her to her proud knees imploring pardon of him! By a word he could have done it, yet he feared lest that word must jeopardize his brother.

In the calm, still watches of that night, as he lay sleepless upon his bed and saw things without heat, there crept a change into his mental attitude. He reviewed all the evidence that had led her to her conclusions, and he was forced to confess that she was in some measure justified of them.

It was a heavy cross to bear. Yet for Lionel's sake he must bear it with what fortitude he could. Lionel must not be sacrificed to his egoism for a deed that in Lionel he could not account other than justified. He were base indeed did he so much as contemplate such a way of escape as that.

But if he did not contemplate it, Lionel did, and went in terror during those days, a terror that kept him from sleep and so fostered the fever in him that on the second day after that grim affair he had the look of a ghost, hollow-eyed and gaunt. Sir Oliver remonstrated with him, and in such terms as to put heart into him anew. Moreover, there was other news that day to allay his terrors: the justices at Truro had been informed of the event and the accusation that was made; but they had refused point-blank to take action in the matter. The reason of it was that one of them was that same Master Anthony Baine who had witnessed the affront offered Sir Oliver. He declared that whatever had happened to Master Godolphin as a consequence was no more than he deserved, no more than he had brought upon himself, and he gave it as his decision that his conscience as a man of honor would not permit him to issue any warrant to the constable.

Sir Oliver received this news from that other witness, the parson, who himself had suffered such rudeness at Godolphin's hands, and who, man of the Gospel and of peace though he was, entirely supported the justice's decision—or so he declared.

Sir Oliver thanked him, protesting that it was kind in him and in Master Baine to take such a view, but for the rest vowing that he had had no hand in the affair, however much appearances might point to him.

When, however, it came to his knowledge two days later that the whole countryside was in a ferment against Master Baine as a consequence of the attitude he had taken up, Sir Oliver summoned the parson and straightway rode with him to the justice's house at Truro, there to afford certain evidence which he had withheld from Rosamund and Sir John Killigrew.

"Master Baine," he said when the three of them were closeted in that gentleman's library, "I have heard of the just and gallant pronouncement you have made, and I am come to thank you and to express my admiration of your courage."

Master Baine bowed gravely. He was a man whom Nature had made grave.

"But since I would not that any evil consequences might attend your action, I am come to lay proof before you that you have acted more rightly even than you think, and that I am not the slayer."

"You are not?" ejaculated Master Baine in amazement.

"Oh, I assure you I use no subterfuge with you, as you shall judge. I have proof to show you, as I say; and I am come to do so now before time might render it impossible. I do not desire it to be made public just yet, Master Baine; but I wish you to draw up some such document as could satisfy the courts at any future time should this matter be taken further, as well it may."

"I assure you, Sir Oliver, that had you killed him after what happened I could not hold you guilty of having done more than punish a boorish and arrogant offender."



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"I know, sir. But it was not so. One of the pieces of evidence gainst me—indeed the chief item—is that from Godolphin's body to my door there was a trail of blood."

The other two grew tensely interested. The parson watched him with unblinking eyes.

"Now it follows logically, I think, inevitably indeed, that the murderer must have been wounded in the encounter. The blood could not possibly have been the victim's, therefore it must have been the slayer's. That the slayer was wounded indeed we know, since there was blood upon Godolphin's sword. Now, Master Baine, and you, Sir Andrew, shall be witnesses that there is upon my body not so much as a scratch of recent date. I will strip me here as naked as when first I had the mischance to stray into this world, and you shall satisfy yourselves of that. Thereafter I shall beg you, Master Baine, to indite the document I have mentioned."

And he removed his doublet as he spoke.

"But since I will not give these louts who accuse me so much satisfaction, lest I seem to go in fear of them, I must beg, sirs, that you will keep this matter entirely private until such time as its publication may be rendered necessary by events."

They saw the reasonableness of his proposal, and they consented, still entirely sceptical. But when they had made their examination they were utterly dumfounded to find all their notions entirely overset. Master Baine, of course, drew up the required document, and signed and sealed it, whilst Sir Andrew added his own signature and seal as witness thereunto.

With this parchment that should be his buckler against any future need, Sir Oliver rode home, uplifted. For, once it were safe to do so, that parchment should be spread before the eyes of Sir John Killigrew and Rosamund, and all might yet be well.

## CHAPTER VI

### JASPER LEIGH

IF THAT Christmas was one of sorrow at Godolphin Court, it was nothing less at Penarrow.

Sir Oliver was moody and silent in those days, given to sit for long hours staring into the heart of the fire and repeating to himself again and again every word of his interview with Rosamund, now in a mood of bitter resentment against her for having so readily believed his guilt, now in a gentler sorrowing humor which made full allowance for the strength of the appearances against him.

His half-brother moved softly about the house now in a sort of self-effacement, never daring to intrude upon Sir Oliver's abstractions. He was well-acquainted with their cause. He knew what had happened at Godolphin Court, knew that Rosamund had dismissed Sir Oliver for all time, and his heart smote him to think that he should leave his brother to bear this burden that rightly belonged to his own shoulders.

The thing preyed so much upon his mind that in an expansive moment one evening he gave it tongue.

"Noll," he said, standing beside his brother's chair in the fire-lit gloom, and resting a hand upon his brother's shoulder, "were it not best to tell the truth?"

Sir Oliver looked up quickly, frowning.

"Art mad?" quoth he. "The truth would hang thee, Lal."

"It might not. And in any case you are suffering something worse than hanging. Oh, I have watched you every hour this week past, and I know the pain that abides in you. It is not just." And he insisted "We had best tell the truth."

Sir Oliver smiled wistfully. He put out a hand and took his brother's.

" 'Tis noble in you to propose it, Lal."

"Not half so noble as it is in you to bear all the suffering for a deed that was my own."

"Bah!" Sir Oliver shrugged impatiently; his glance fell away from Lionel's face and returned to the consideration of the fire. "After all, I can throw off the burden when I will. Such knowledge as that will enhearten a man through any trial."

He had spoken in a harsh, cynical tone, and Lionel had turned cold at his words. He stood a long while in silence there, turning them over in his mind and considering the riddle which they presented him. He thought of asking his brother bluntly for the key to it, for the precise meaning of his disconcerting statement; but courage failed him. He feared lest Sir Oliver should confirm his own dread interpretation of it.

He drew away after a time, and soon after went to bed. For days thereafter the phrase rankled in his mind, "I can throw

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off the burden when I will." Conviction grew upon him that Sir Oliver meant that he was enheartened by the knowledge that by speaking if he chose he could clear himself. That Sir Oliver would so speak he could not think. Indeed, he was entirely assured that Sir Oliver was very far from intending to throw off his burden. Yet he might come to change his mind.

Lionel sought to assure himself that his brother was a man of stern fibers, a man who never lost control of himself. But against this he would argue that what had happened in the past was no guarantee of what might happen in the future; that a limit was set to the endurance of every man be he never so strong, and that it was far from impossible that the limit of Sir Oliver's endurance might be reached in this affair. If that happened, in what case should he find himself?

The answer to this was a picture beyond his fortitude to contemplate. The danger of his being sent to trial and made to suffer the extreme penalty of the law would be far greater now than if he had spoken at once. The tale he could then have told must have compelled some attention, for he was accounted a man of unsmirched honor and his word must carry some weight. But now none would believe him. They would argue from his silence and from his having suffered his brother to be unjustly accused that he was craven-hearted and dishonorable, and that if he had acted thus it was because he had no good defense to offer for his deed.

Thus he came to the dread conclusion that in his endeavors to screen himself he had but enmeshed himself the more inextricably. If Oliver but spoke he was lost. And back he came to the question: What assurance had he that Oliver would not speak?

The fear of this, from occurring to him occasionally, began to haunt him day and night, and for all that the fever had left him and his wound was entirely healed, he remained pale and thin and hollow-eyed. Indeed the secret terror that was in his soul glared out of his eyes at every moment.

Coming one afternoon into the dining-room, which was ever Sir Oliver's favorite haunt in the mansion of Penarrow, Lionel found his half-brother in that brooding attitude, elbow on knee and chin on palm, staring into the fire. This was so habitual now in Sir Oliver that it had begun to irritate Lionel's tense nerves; it had come to seem to him that in this listlessness was a studied tacit reproach aimed at himself.

"Why do you sit ever thus over the fire like some old crone?" he growled, voicing at last the irritability that so long had been growing in him.

Sir Oliver looked round with mild surprize in his glance. Then from Lionel his eyes traveled to the long windows.

"It rains," he said.

"It was not your wont to be driven to the fireside by rain. But rain or shine 'tis ever the same. You never go abroad."

"To what end?" quoth Sir Oliver, with the same mildness, but a wrinkle of bewilderment coming gradually between his dark brows. "Do you suppose I love to meet lowering glances, to see heads approach one another so that confidential curses of me may be muttered?"

"Ha!" cried Lionel, short and sharp, his sunken eyes blazing suddenly. "It has come to this, then, that having voluntarily done this thing to shield me, you now reproach me with it."

"I?" cried Sir Oliver, aghast.

"Your very words are a reproach. D'ye think I do not read the meaning that lies under them?"

Sir Oliver rose slowly, staring at his brother. He shook his head and smiled.

"Lal, Lal!" he said. "Your wound has left you disordered, boy. With what have I reproached you? What was this hidden meaning of my words? If you will read aright you will see it to be that to go abroad is to involve myself in fresh quarrels, for my mood is become short, and I will not brook sour looks and mutterings. That is all."

He advanced and set his hands upon his brother's shoulders. Holding him so at arm's length he considered him, what time Lionel drooped his head and a slow flush overspread his cheeks.

"Dear fool!" he said, and shook him. "What ails you? You are pale and gaunt, and not yourself at all. I have a notion. I'll furnish me a ship and you shall sail with me to my old hunting-grounds. There is life out yonder—life that will restore your vigor and your zest, and perhaps mine as well. How say you, now?"

Lionel looked up, his eye brightening. Then a thought occurred to him; a thought so mean that again the color flooded into his cheeks, for he was shamed by it. Yet it clung. If he sailed with Oliver, men

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would say that he was a partner in the guilt attributed to his brother.

He realized to the full the contemptible quality of his thought and hated himself for conceiving it. But he could not shake off its dominion. It was stronger than his will.

His brother observing this hesitation, and misreading it, drew him to the fireside and made him sit.

"Listen," he said, as he dropped into the chair opposite. "There is a fine ship standing in the roads below, off Smithick. You'll have seen her. Her master is a desperate adventurer named Jasper Leigh, who is to be found any afternoon in the ale-house at Penycumwick. I know him of old, and he and his ship are to be acquired. He is ripe for any venture, from scuttling Spaniards to trading in slaves, and so that the price be high enough we may buy him body and soul. His is a stomach that refuses nothing, so there be money in the venture. So here is ship and master ready found; the rest I will provide—the crew, the munitions, the armament, and by the end of March we shall see the Lizard dropping astern. What do you say, Lal? 'Tis surely better than to sit moping here in this place of gloom."

"I'll—I'll think of it," said Lionel, but so listlessly that all Sir Oliver's quickening enthusiasm perished again at once, and no more was said of the venture.

But Lionel did not altogether reject the notion. If on the one hand he was repelled by it, on the other he was attracted almost despite himself. He went so far as to acquire the habit of riding daily over to Penycumwick, and there he made the acquaintance of that hardy and scarred adventurer of whom Sir Oliver had spoken, and listened to the marvels the fellow had to tell—many of them too marvelous to be true—of hazards upon distant seas.

But one day early in March Master Jasper Leigh had a tale of another kind for him, news that dispelled from Lionel's mind all interest in the captain's ventures on the Spanish Main. The seaman had followed the departing Lionel to the door of the little inn and stood by his stirrup after he had got to horse.

"A word in your ear, good Master Tressilian," said he. "D'ye know what is being concerted here against your brother?"

"Against my brother?"

"Aye—in the matter of the killing of Master Peter Godolphin last Christmas. Seeing that the justices would not move of theirselves, some folk ha' petitioned the Lieutenant of Cornwall to command them to grant a warrant for Sir Oliver's arrest on a charge o' murder. But the justices ha' refused to be driven by his lordship, answering that they hold their office direct from the queen and that in such a matter they are answerable to none but her Grace. And now I hear that a petition be gone to London to the queen herself, begging her to command her justices to perform their duty or quit their office."

Lionel drew a sharp breath, and with dilating eyes regarded the mariner, but made him no answer.

Jasper laid a long finger against his nose and his eyes grew cunning.

"I thought I'd warn you, sir, so as ye may bid Sir Oliver look to hisself. 'Tis a fine seaman and fine seamen be none so plentiful."

Lionel drew his purse from his pocket and without so much as looking into its contents dropped it into the seaman's ready hand, with a muttered word of thanks.

He rode home in terror almost. It was come. The blow was about to fall, and his brother at last would be forced to speak. At Penarrow a fresh shock awaited him. He learned from old Nicholas that Sir Oliver was from home, that he had ridden over to Godolphin Court.

The instant conclusion prompted by Lionel's terror was that already the news had reached Sir Oliver and that he had instantly taken action; for he could not conceive that his brother should go to Godolphin Court upon any other business.

BUT his fears on that score were very idle. Sir Oliver, unable longer to endure the present state of things, had ridden over to lay before Rosamund that proof with which he had taken care to furnish himself. He could do so at last without any fear of hurting Lionel. His journey, however, had been entirely fruitless. She had refused pointblank to receive him, and for all that with a humility entirely foreign to him he had induced a servant to return to her with a most urgent message, yet had he been denied. He returned stricken to Penarrow, there to find his brother awaiting him in a passion of impatience.

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"Well?" Lionel greeted him. "What will you do now?"

Sir Oliver looked at him from under brows that scowled darkly in reflection of his thoughts.

"Do now? Of what do you talk?" quoth he.

"Have you not heard?" And Lionel told him the news.

Sir Oliver stared long at him when he had done, then his lips tightened and he smote his brow.

"So!" he cried. "Would that be why she refused to see me? Did she conceive that I went perhaps to plead? Could she think that? Could she?"

He crossed to the fire-place and stirred the logs with his boot angrily.

"Oh! 'Twere too unworthy. Yet of a certainty 'tis her doing, this."

"What shall you do?" insisted Lionel, unable to repress the question that was uppermost in his mind; and his voice shook.

"Do?" Sir Oliver looked at him over his shoulder. "Prick this bubble, by Heaven! Make an end of it for them, confound them and cover them with shame."

He said it roughly, angrily, and Lionel recoiled, deeming that roughness and anger aimed at himself. He sank into a chair, his knees loosened by his sudden fear.

"You—you will tell them the truth?" he said, in small, quavering voice.

Sir Oliver turned and considered him more attentively.

"A God's name, Lal, what's in thy mind now?" he asked, almost roughly. "Tell them the truth? Why, of course—but only as it concerns myself. You're not supposing that I shall tell them it was you? You'll not be accounting me capable of that?"

"What other way is there?"

Sir Oliver explained the matter. The explanation brought Lionel relief. But this relief was ephemeral. Further reflection presented a new fear to him. It came to him that if Sir Oliver cleared himself of necessity his own implication must follow.

Had he but gone with that fear of his to his brother, or had he but been able to abate them sufficiently to allow reason to prevail, he must have been brought to understand how much further they carried him than was at all justified by probability. Oliver would have shown him this, would have told him that with the collapsing of the charge against himself no fresh charge could be levelled against any there, that no scrap of suspicion had ever attached to Lionel or ever could. But Lionel dared not seek his brother in this matter. In his heart he was ashamed of his fears; in his heart he knew himself for a craven. He realized to the full the hideousness of his selfishness, and yet, as before, he was not strong enough to conquer it. In short his love of himself was greater than his love of his brother, or of twenty brothers.

The morrow—a blustering day of late March—found him again at that ale-house at Penycumwick in the company of Jasper Leigh. A course had occurred to him, as the only course now possible. Last night his brother had muttered something of going to Killigrew with his proofs since Rosamund refused to receive him. Through Killigrew he would reach her, he had said; and he would yet see her on her knees craving his pardon for the wrong she had done him, for the cruelty she had shown him.

Lionel knew that Killigrew was absent from home just then; but he was expected to return by Easter, and to Easter there was but a week. Therefore he had little time in which to act, little time in which to execute the project that had come into his mind. He cursed himself for conceiving it, but held to it with all the strength of a weak nature.

Yet when he came to sit face to face with Jasper Leigh in that little inn-parlor with the scrubbed table of plain deal between them, he lacked the courage to set his proposal forth. They drank sherry sack stiffly laced with brandy by Lionel's suggestion, instead of the more customary mulled ale. Yet not until he had consumed best part of a pint of it did Lionel feel himself heartened to broaching his loathsome business. Through his head hummed the words his brother had said some time ago when first the name of Jasper Leigh had passed between them—"a desperate adventurer ripe for anything. So the price be high enough you may buy him body and soul."

Money enough to buy Jasper Leigh was ready to Lionel's hand; but it was Sir Oliver's money—the money that was placed at Lionel's disposal by his half-brother's open-handed bounty. And this money he was to employ for Oliver's utter ruin! He cursed himself for a filthy, contemptible hound; he cursed the foul fiend that whispered such suggestions into his mind; he knew himself,

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despised himself and reviled himself until he came to swear to be strong and to go through with whatever might await him sooner than be guilty of such a baseness; the next moment that same resolve would set him shuddering again as he viewed the inevitable consequences that must attend it.

Suddenly the captain set him a question, very softly, that fired the train and blew all his lingering self-resistance into shreds.

"You'll ha' borne my warning to Sir Oliver?" he asked, lowering his voice so as not to be overheard by the vintner who was stirring beyond the thin wooden partition.

Master Lionel nodded, nervously fingering the jewel in his ear, his eyes shifting from their consideration of the seaman's coarse, weather-tanned and hairy countenance.

"I did," he said. "But Sir Oliver is headstrong. He will not stir."

"Will he not?" The captain stroked his bushy red beard and cursed profusely and horribly after the fashion of the sea. "'Od's wounds. He's very like to swing if he bides him here."

"Aye," said Lionel, "if he bides."

He felt his mouth turn dry as he spoke; his heart thudded, but its thuds were softened by a slight insensibility which the liquor had produced in him.

He uttered the words in so curious a tone that the sailor's dark eyes peered at him from under his heavy sandy eyebrows. There was alert inquiry in that glance. Master Lionel got up suddenly.

"Let us take a turn outside, captain," said he.

The captain's eyes narrowed. He scented business. There was something plaguily odd about this young gentleman's manner. He tossed off the remains of his sack, slapped down the pot and rose.

"Your servant, Master Tressilian," said he.

Outside our gentleman untethered his horse from the iron ring to which he had attached the bridle; leading his horse he turned seaward and strode down the road that wound along the estuary toward Smithick.

A SHARP breeze from the north was whipping the water into white peaks of foam; the sky was of a hard brightness and the sun shone brilliantly. The tide was running out, and the rock in the very neck of the haven was thrusting its black crest above the water. A cable's length this side of it rode the black hull and naked spars of the *Swallow*—Captain Leigh's ship.

Lionel stepped along in silence, very gloomy and pensive, hesitating even now. And the crafty mariner reading this hesitation, and anxious to conquer it for the sake of such profit as he conceived might lie in the proposal which he scented, paved the way for him at last.

"I think that ye'll have some matter to propose to me," said he slyly. "Out with it, sir, for there never was a man more ready to serve you."

"The fact is," said Lionel, watching the other's face with a sidelong glance, "I am in a difficult position, Master Leigh."

"I've been in a many," laughed the captain, "but never yet in one through which I could not win. Strip forth your own, and haply I can do as much for you as I am wont to do for myself."

"Why, it is this wise," said the other. "My brother will assuredly hang as you have said if he bides him here. He is lost if they bring him to trial. And in that case, faith, I am lost too. It dishonors a man's family to have a member of it hanged. 'Tis a horrible thing to have happen."

"Indeed, indeed!" the sailor agreed encouragingly.

"I would abstract him from this," pursued Lionel, and at the same time cursed the foul fiend that prompted him such specious words to cloak his villainy. "I would abstract him from it, and yet 'tis against my conscience that he should go unpunished; for I swear to you, Master Leigh, that I abhor the deed—a cowardly, murderous deed!"

"Ah!" said the captain. And lest that grim ejaculation should check his gentleman he made haste to add:

"To be sure! To be sure!"

Master Lionel stopped and faced the other squarely, his shoulders to his horse.

"I'll be quite plain and open with you, Master Leigh. Peter Godolphin was my friend. Sir Oliver is no more than my half-brother. I would give a deal to the man who would abstract Sir Oliver secretly from the doom that hangs over him, and yet do the thing in such a way that Sir Oliver should not thereby escape the punishment he deserves."

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The captain looked grim. He laid a finger upon Master Lionel's velvet doublet in line with that false heart of his.

"I am your man," said he. "But the risk is great. Yet ye say that ye'd give a deal——"

"Yourself shall name the price," said Lionel quickly, his eyes burning feverishly, his cheeks white.

"Oh, I can contrive it, never fear," said the captain. "I know to a nicety what you require. How say you now—if I was to carry him overseas to the plantations where they lack toilers of just such thews as his?"

He lowered his voice and spoke with some slight hesitation, fearing that he proposed perhaps more than his prospective employer might desire.

"He might return," was the answer that dispelled all doubts on that score.

"Ah!" said the skipper. "What o' the Barbary rovers, then? They lack slaves and are ever ready to trade, though they be niggardly payers. I never heard of none that returned once they had him safe aboard their galleys. I ha' done some trading with them, bartering human freights for spices and eastern carpets and the like."

Master Lionel breathed hard.

" 'Tis a horrible fate is't not?"

The captain stroked his beard.

"Yet 'tis the only really safe bestowal, and when all is said 'tis not so horrible as hanging, and certainly less dishonoring to a man's kin. Ye'ld be serving Sir Oliver and yourself."

" 'Tis so, 'tis so," cried Master Lionel almost fiercely. "And the price?"

The seaman shifted on his short, sturdy legs, and his face grew pensive.

"A hundred pound?" he suggested tentatively.

"Done with you for a hundred pounds," was the prompt answer—so prompt that Captain Leigh realized he had driven a fool's bargain which it was incumbent upon him to amend.

"That is, a hundred pound for myself," he corrected slowly. "Then there be the crew to reckon for—to keep their counsel and lend a hand; 'twill mean another hundred at the least.

Master Lionel considered a moment.

"It is more than I can lay my hands on at short notice. But, look you, you shall have a hundred and fifty pounds in coin and the balance in jewels. You shall not be the loser in that, I promise you. And when you come again, and bring me word that all is done as you now undertake there shall be the like again."

Upon that the bargain was settled. And when Lionel came to talk of ways and means he found that he had allied himself to a man who understood his business thoroughly. All the assistance that the skipper asked was that Master Lionel should lure his gentleman to some concerted spot conveniently near the waterside. There Leigh would have a boat and his men in readiness, and the rest might very safely be left to him.

In a flash Lionel bethought him of the proper place for this. He swung round, and pointed across the water to Trefusis Point and the gray pile of Godolphin Court all bathed in sunshine now.

"Yonder, at Trefusis Point in the shadow of Godolphin Court at eight tomorrow night, when there will be no moon. I'll see that he is there. But on your life do not miss him."

"Trust me," said Master Leigh. "And the money?"

"When you have him safely aboard come to me at Penarrow," he replied, which showed that after all he did not trust Master Leigh any further than he was compelled.

On that they parted. Lionel mounted and rode away, whilst Master Leigh made a trumpet of his hands and hallooed to the ship.

As he stood waiting for the boat that came off to fetch him, a smile slowly overspread the adventurer's rugged face.

## CHAPTER VII

### TREPANNED

MASTER LIONEL was absent most of the following day from Penarrow, upon a pretext of making certain purchases in Truro. It would be half-past seven when he returned; and as he entered he met Sir Oliver in the hall.

"I have a message for you from Godolphin Court," he announced, and saw his brother stiffen and his face change color. "A boy met me at the gates and bade me tell you that Mistress Rosamund desires a word with you forthwith."

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Sir Oliver's heart almost stopped, then went off at a gallop.

"Be thou blessed for these good tidings!" he answered on a note of high excitement. "I go at once."

And on the instant he departed. Such was his eagerness, indeed, that under the hot spur of it he did not even stay to fetch that parchment which was to be his unanswerable advocate.

Master Lionel said no word as his brother swept out. He shrank back a little into the shadows. He was white to the lips and felt as he would stifle. As the door closed he moved suddenly. He sprang to follow Sir Oliver. Conscience cried out to him that he could not do this thing. But Fear was swift to answer that outcry. Unless he permitted what was planned to take its course, his life might pay the penalty.

He turned, and lurched into the dining-room upon legs that trembled.

He found the table set for supper as on that other night when he had staggered in with a wound in his side to be cared for and sheltered by Sir Oliver. He did not approach the table; he crossed to the fire, and sat down there holding out his hands to the blaze. He was very cold and could not still his trembling. His very teeth chattered.

Nicholas came in to know if he would sup. He answered unsteadily that despite the lateness of the hour he would await Sir Oliver's return.

"Is Sir Oliver abroad?" quoth the servant in surprize.

"He went out a moment since, I know not whither," replied Lionel. "But since he has not supped he is not like to be long absent."

Upon that he dismissed the servant, and sat huddled there, a prey to mental tortures which were not to be repressed. His mind would turn upon naught but the steadfast, unwavering affection of which Sir Oliver ever had been prodigal toward him. In this very matter of Peter Godolphin's death, what sacrifices had not Sir Oliver made to shield him? From so much love and self-sacrifice in the past he inclined to argue now that not even in extreme peril would his brother betray him. And then that bad streak of fear which made a villian of him reminded him that to argue thus was to argue upon supposition, that it would be perilous to trust such an assumption; that if, after all, Sir Oliver should fail him in the crucial test, then was he lost indeed.

Then came doubt, and, finally, assurance of another sort, assurance that this was not so and that he knew it; assurance that he lied to himself, seeking to condone the thing he did. He took his head in his hands and groaned aloud. He was a villian, a black-hearted, soulless villian! He reviled himself again. There came a moment when he rose shuddering, resolved even in this eleventh hour to go after his brother and save him from the doom that awaited him out yonder in the night.

But again that resolve was withered by the breath of selfish fear. Limply he resumed his seat, and his thoughts took a fresh turn.

The clock over the stables chimed the hour of eight. Master Lionel shrank back in his chair at the sound. The thing would be doing even now. In his mind he saw it all—saw his brother come running in his eagerness to the gates of Godolphin Court, and then dark forms resolve themselves from the surrounding darkness and fall silently upon him.

Another half-hour sat he there. The thing was done by now, and this assurance seemed to quiet him a little.

Then came Nicholas again to babble of some possible mischance having overtaken his master.

"What mischance should have overtaken him?" growled Lionel, as if in scorn of the idea.

"I pray none indeed," replied the servant. "But Sir Oliver lacks not for enemies nowadays, and 'tis scarce zafe for he to be abroad after dark."

Master Lionel dismissed the notion contemptuously. For pretense's sake he announced that he would wait no longer, whereupon Nicholas brought in his supper, and left him again to go and linger about the door, looking out into the night and listening for his master's return. He had paid a visit to the stables, and knew that Sir Oliver had gone forth afoot.

Meanwhile Master Lionel must make pretense of eating, though actual eating must have choked him. He smeared his platter, broke food, and avidly drank a bumper of claret. Then he, too, feigned a growing anxiety and went to join Nicholas. Thus they spent the weary night, watching for the return of one whom Master Lionel knew would return no more.

At dawn they roused the servants and

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sent them to scour the countryside and put the news of Sir Oliver's disappearance abroad. Lionel himself rode out to Arwenack to ask Sir John Killigrew bluntly if he knew aught of this matter.

Sir John showed a startled face, but swore readily enough that he had not so much as seen Sir Oliver for days. He was gentle with Lionel, whom he liked, as everybody liked him. The lad was so mild and kindly in his ways; so vastly different from his arrogant overbearing brother, that his virtue shone the more brightly by that contrast.

"I confess it is natural you should come to me," said Sir John. "But, my word on it, I have no knowledge of him. It is not my way to beset my enemies in the dark."

"Indeed, indeed, Sir John, I had not supposed it in my heart," replied the afflicted Lionel. "Forgive me that I should have come to ask a question so unworthy. Set it down to my distracted state. I have not been the same man these months, I think since that happening in Godolphin Park. The thing has preyed upon my mind. It is a fearsome burden to know your own brother—though I thank God he is no more than my half-brother—guilty of so foul a deed."

"How?" cried Killigrew, amazed. "You say that? You believed it yourself?"

Master Lionel looked confused, a look which Sir John entirely misunderstood and interpreted entirely in the young man's favor. And it was thus and in that moment that was sown the generous seed of the friendship that was to spring up between these two men, its roots fertilized by Sir John's pity that one so gentle-natured, so honest, and so upright should be cursed with so villainous a brother.

"I see, I see," he said. And he sighed. "You know that we are daily expecting an order from the Queen to her justices to take the action which hitherto they have refused against your—against Sir Oliver."

He frowned thoughtfully.

"D'ye think Sir Oliver had news of this?"

At once Master Lionel saw the drift of what was in the other's mind.

"I know it," he replied. "Myself I bore it him. But why do you ask?"

"Does it not help us perhaps to understand and explain Sir Oliver's disappearance? God lack! Surely, knowing that, he were a fool to have tarried here, for he would hang beyond all doubt did he stay for the coming of her grace's messengers."

"My God!" said Lionel, staring. "You—you think he is fled, then?"

Sir John shrugged.

"What else is to be thought?"

Lionel hung his head.

"What else, indeed?" said he, and took his leave like a man overwrought, as indeed he was. He had never considered that so obvious a conclusion must follow upon his work so fully to explain the happening and to set at rest any doubt concerning it.

He returned to Penarrow, and bluntly told Nicholas what Sir John suspected and what he feared himself must be the true reason of Sir Oliver's disappearance. The servant, however, was none so easy to convince.

"But do ee believe that he done it?" cried Nicholas. "Do ee believe it, Master Lionel?"

There was reproach amounting to horror in the servant's voice.

"God help me, what else can I believe now that he is fled."

Nicholas sidled up to him with tightened lips. He set two gnarled fingers on the young man's arm.

"He'm not fled, Master Lionel," he announced with grim impressiveness. "He'm never a turntail. Sir Oliver he don't fear neither man nor devil, and if so be him had killed Master Godolphin, he'd never ha' denied it. Don't ee believe Sir John Killigrew. Sir John ever hated he."

But in all that countryside the servant was the only one to hold this view. If a doubt had lingered anywhere of Sir Oliver's guilt that doubt was now dispelled by this flight of his before the approach of the expected orders from the Queen.

LATER that day came Captain Leigh to Penarrow inquiring for Sir Oliver.

Nicholas brought word of his presence and his inquiry to Master Lionel, who bade him be admitted.

The thick-set little seaman rolled in on his bowed legs, and leered at his employer when they were alone.

"He's snug and safe aboard," he announced. "The thing were done as clean as peeling an apple, and as quiet."

"Why did you ask for him?" quoth Master Lionel.

"Why?" Jasper leered again. "My business was with him. There was some talk

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between us of him going a voyage with me. I've heard the gossip over at Smithick. This will fit in with it." He laid that finger of his to his nose. "Trust me to help a sound tale along. 'Twere a clumsy business to come here asking for you, sir. Ye'll know now how to account for my visit."

Lionel paid him the price agreed and dismissed him upon receiving the assurance that the *Swallow* would put to sea upon the next tide.

When it became known that Sir Oliver had been in treaty with Master Leigh for a passage overseas, and that it was but on that account that Master Leigh had tarried in that haven, even Nicholas began to doubt.

Gradually Lionel recovered his tranquillity as the days flowed on. What was done was done, and, in any case, being now beyond recall, there was no profit in repining. He never knew how fortune aided him, as fortune will sometimes aid a villian. The royal poursuivants arrived some six days later, and Master Baine was the recipient of a curt summons to render himself to London, there to account for his breach of trust in having refused to perform his sworn duty. Had Sir Andrew Flack but survived the chill that had carried him off a month ago, Master Justice Baine would have made short work of the accusation lodged against him.

As it was, when he urged the positive knowledge he possessed, and told them how he had made the examination to which Sir Oliver had voluntarily submitted, his single word carried no slightest conviction. Not for a moment was it supposed that this was aught but the subterfuge of one who had been lax in his duty and who sought to save himself from the consequences of that laxity. And the fact that he cited as his fellow-witness a gentleman now deceased but served to confirm his judges in this opinion. He was deposed from his office and subjected to a heavy fine, and there the matter ended, for the hue-and-cry that was afoot entirely failed to discover any trace of the missing Sir Oliver.

For Master Lionel a new existence set in from that day. Looked upon as one in danger of suffering for his brother's sins, the countryside determined to help him as far as possible to bear his burden. Great stress was laid upon the fact that after all he was no more than Sir Oliver's half-brother; some there were who would have carried their kindness to the lengths of suggesting that perhaps he was not even that, and that it was but natural that Ralph Tressilian's second wife should have repaid her husband in kind for his outrageous infidelities.

This movement of sympathy was led by Sir John Killigrew, and it spread in so rapid and marked a manner that very soon Master Lionel was almost persuaded that it was no more than he deserved, and he began to sun himself in the favor of a countryside that hitherto had shown little but hostility for men of the Tressilian blood.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE SPANIARD

THE *Swallow*, having passed through a gale in the Bay of Biscay—a gale which she weathered like the surprizingly steady old tub she was—rounded Cape Finisterre and so emerged from tempest into peace, from leaden skies and mountainous seas into a sunny azure calm. It was like a sudden transition from Winter into Spring, and she ran along now, close hauled to the soft easterly breeze, with a gentle list to port.

It had never been Master Leigh's intent to have got so far as this without coming to an understanding with his prisoner. But the wind had been stronger than his intentions, and he had been compelled to run before it and to head to southward until its fury should abate. Thus it fell out that the skipper was forced to wait until they stood along the coast of Portugal—but well out to sea, for the coast of Portugal was none too healthy just then to English seamen—before commanding Sir Oliver to be haled into his presence.

In the cramped quarters of the cabin in the poop of the little vessel sat her captain at a greasy table, over which a lamp was swinging faintly to the gentle heave of the ship. He was smoking a foul pipe, whose fumes hung heavily upon the air of that little chamber, and there was a bottle of Nantes at his elbow.

To him, sitting thus in state, was Sir Oliver introduced—his wrists still pinioned behind him. He was haggard and hollow-eyed, and he carried a week's growth of beard on his chin. Also his garments were still in disorder from the struggle he had made when taken, and from the fact that

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he had been compelled to lie in them ever since.

Since his height was such that it was impossible for him to stand upright in that low-ceilinged cabin, a stool was thrust forward for him by one of the ruffians of Leigh's crew who had haled him from his confinement beneath the hatchway.

He sat down quite listlessly, and stared vacantly at the skipper. Master Leigh was somewhat discomposed by this odd calm when he had looked for angry outbursts. He dismissed the two seamen who had fetched Sir Oliver, and when they had departed and closed the cabin door he addressed his captive.

"Sir Oliver," said he, stroking his red beard, "ye've been most foully abused."

The sunshine filtered through one of the horn windows and beat full upon Sir Oliver's expressionless face.

"It was not necessary, you knave, to bring me hither to tell me so much," he answered.

"Quite so," said Master Leigh. "But I have something more to add. Ye'll be thinking that I ha' done you a disservice. There ye wrong me. Through me you are brought to know true friends from secret enemies; henceforward ye'll know which to trust and which to mistrust."

Sir Oliver seemed to rouse himself a little from his passivity, stimulated despite himself by the impudence of this rogue. He stretched a leg and smiled sourly.

"You'll end by telling me that I am in your debt," said he.

"You'll end by saying so, yourself," the captain assured him. "D'ye know what I was bidden do with you?"

"Faith, I neither know nor care," was the surprizing answer wearily delivered. "If it is for my entertainment that you propose to tell me, I beg you'll spare yourself the trouble."

It was not an answer that helped the captain. He pulled at his pipe a moment.

"I was bidden," said he presently, "to carry you to Barbary and sell you there into the service of the Moors. That I might serve you, I made believe to accept this task."

"God's death!" swore Sir Oliver. "You carry make-believe to an odd length."

"The weather has been against me. It were no intention o' mine to ha' come so far south with you. But we've been driven by the gale. That is overpast, and so that ye'll promise to bear no plaint against me, and to make good some of the loss I'll make by going out of my course, and missing a cargo that I wot of, I'll put about and fetch you home again within a week."

Sir Oliver looked at him and smiled grimly.

"Now what a rogue are you that can keep faith with none!" he cried. "First you take money to carry me off; and then you bid me pay you to carry me back again."

"Ye wrong me, sir, I vow ye do! I can keep faith when honest men employ me, and ye should know it, Sir Oliver. But who keeps faith with rogues is a fool—and that I am not, as ye should also know. I ha' done this thing that a rogue might be revealed to you and thwarted, as well as that I might make some little profit out of this ship o' mine. I am frank with ye, Sir Oliver. I ha' had some two hundred pound in money and trinkets from your brother. Give me the like and ——"

But now of a sudden Sir Oliver's listlessness was all dispelled. It fell from him like a cloak, and he sat forward, wide awake and with some show of anger even.

"How do you say?" he cried, on a sharp, high note.

The captain stared at him, his pipe neglected.

"I say that if so be as ye'll pay me the same sum which your brother paid me to carry you off——"

"My brother?" roared the knight. "Do you say my brother?"

"I said your brother."

"Master Lionel?" the other demanded still.

"What other brothers have you?" quoth Master Leigh.

There fell a pause and Sir Oliver looked straight before him, his head sunken a little between his shoulders.

"Let me understand," he said at length. "Do you say that my brother Lionel paid you money to carry me off—in short, that my presence aboard this foul hulk of yours is due to him?"

"Whom else had ye suspected? Or did ye think that I did it for my own personal diversion?"

"Answer me!" bellowed Sir Oliver, writhing in his bonds.

"I ha' answered you more than once already. Still, I tell you once again, since ye

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are slow to understand it, that I was paid a matter of two hundred pound by your brother, Master Lionel Tressilian, to carry you off to Barbary and there sell you for a slave. Is that plain to you?"

"As plain as it is false. You lie, you dog!"

"Softly, softly!" quoth Master Leigh good-humoredly.

"I say you lie!"

Master Leigh considered him a moment.

"Sets the wind so!" said he at length, and without another word he rose and went to a sea-chest ranged against the wooden wall of the cabin.

He opened it and took thence a leather bag. From this he produced a handful of jewels. He thrust them under Sir Oliver's nose.

"Haply," said he, "ye'll be acquainted with some of them. They was given me to make up the sum since your brother had not the whole two hundred pound in coin. Take a look at them."

Sir Oliver recognized a ring and a long pear-shaped pearl ear-ring that had been his brother's; he recognized a medallion that he himself had given Lionel two years ago; and so, one by one, he recognized every trinket placed before him.

His head drooped to his breast, and he sat thus awhile like a man stunned.

"My God!" he groaned miserably, at last. "Who, then, is left me! Lionel too! Lionel!"

A sob shook the great frame. Two tears slowly trickled down that haggard face and were lost in the stubble of beard upon his chin.

"I am accursed!" he said.

Never without such evidence could he have believed this thing. From the moment that he was beset outside the gates of Godolphin Court he had conceived it to be the work of Rosamund, and his listlessness was begotten of the thought that she could have suffered conviction of his guilt and her hatred of him to urge her to such lengths as these.

This conviction had been gall and wormwood to him; it had drugged his very senses, reducing him to a listless indifference to any fate that might be reserved him. Yet it had not been so bitter a draft as this present revelation. After all, in her case there were some grounds for the hatred that had come to take the place of her erstwhile love. But in Lionel's what grounds were possible? What motives could exist for such an action as this, other than a monstrous, a loathly egoism which desired perhaps to insure that the blame for the death of Peter Godolphin should not be shifted from the shoulders that were unjustly bearing it, and the accursed desire to profit by the removal of the man who had been brother, father and all else to him?

He shuddered in sheer horror. It was incredible, and yet beyond a doubt it was true. For all the love which he had showered upon Lionel, for all the sacrifices of self which he had made to shield him, this was Lionel's return. Were all the world against him he still must have believed Lionel true to him, and in that belief must have been enheartened a little. And now— His sense of loneliness, of utter destitution overwhelmed him. Then slowly of his sorrow resentment was begotten, and being begotten it grew rapidly until it filled his mind and whelmed in its turn all else.

"Master Leigh," said he, "what is your price to carry me home again to England?"

"Why, Sir Oliver," said he, "I think the price I was paid to carry you off would be a fair one. The one would wipe out t'other as it were."

"You shall have twice the sum when you land me on Trefusis Point again," was the instant answer.

The captain's little eyes blinked and his shaggy red eyebrows came together in a frown. Here was too speedy an acquiescence. There must be guile behind it, or he knew nought of the ways of men.

"What mischief are ye brooding?" he sneered.

"Mischief, man? To you?" Sir Oliver laughed hoarsely. "God's light, knave, d'ye think I consider you in this matter, or d'ye think I've room in my mind for such petty resentments together with that other?"

It was the truth. So absolute was the bitter sway of his anger against Lionel that he could give no thought to this rascally seaman's share in the adventure.

"Will ye give me your word for that?"

"My word? Pshaw, man! I have given it already. I swear that you shall be paid the sum I've named the moment you set me ashore again in England. Is that enough for you? Then cut me these bonds, and let us make an end of my present condition."

"Faith, I am glad to deal with so sensible a man! Ye take it in the proper spirit. Ye

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see that what I ha' done I ha' but done in the way of my calling, that I am but a tool, and that what blame there be belongs to them which hired me to this deed."

"Aye, ye're but a tool—a dirty tool, whetted with gold; no more. 'Tis admitted. Cut me these bonds, a God's name! I'm weary o' being trussed like a capon."

The captain drew his knife, crossed to Sir Oliver's side and slashed his bonds away without further word. Sir Oliver stood up so suddenly that he smote his head against the low ceiling of the cabin, and so sat down again at once. And in that moment from without and above there came a cry which sent the skipper to the cabin door. He flung it open, and so let out the smoke and let in the sunshine. He passed out on to the poop-deck, and Sir Oliver—conceiving himself at liberty to do so—followed him.

IN THE waist below a little knot of shaggy seamen were crowding to the larboard bulwarks, looking out to sea; on the forecastle there was another similar assembly, all staring intently ahead and toward the land. They were off Cape Roca at the time, and when Captain Leigh saw by how much they had lessened their distance from shore since last he had conned the ship, he swore ferociously at his mate who had charge of the wheel. Ahead of them away on their larboard bow and in line with the mouth of the Tagus from which she had issued—and where not a doubt but she had been lying in wait for such stray craft as this—came a great tall-masted ship, equipped with topgallants, running well-nigh before the wind with every foot of canvas spread.

Close-hauled as was the *Swallow* and with her topsails and mizzen reefed she was not making more than one knot to the Spaniard's five—for that she was a Spaniard was beyond all doubt judging by the haven whence she issued.

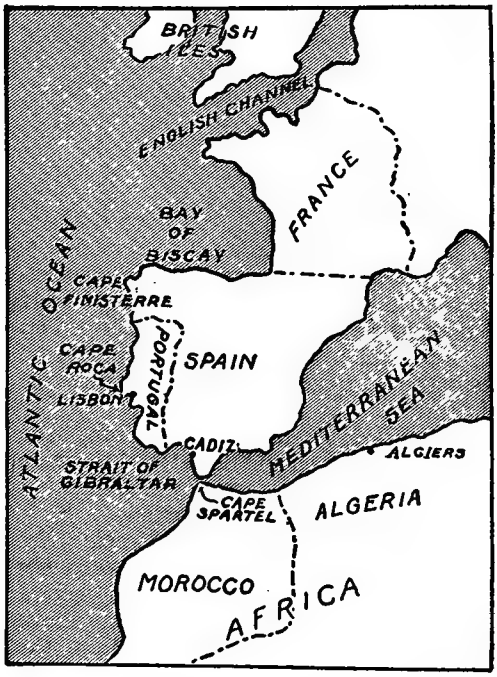
"Luff alee!" bawled the skipper, and he sprang to the wheel, thrusting the mate aside with a blow of his elbow that almost sent him sprawling.

" 'Twas yourself set the course," the fellow protested.

"Thou lubberly fool," roared the skipper. "I bade thee keep the same distance from shore. If the land comes jutting out to meet us are we to keep straight on until we pile her up?"

He span the wheel round in his hands, and turned her down the wind. Then he relinquished the helm to the mate again.

"Hold her thus," he commanded, and




bellowing orders as he went, he heaved himself down the companion to see them executed.

Men sprang to the ratlines to obey him, and went swarming aloft to let out the reefs of the topsails; others ran astern to do the like by the mizzen, and soon they had her leaping and plunging through the green water with every sheet unfurled, racing straight out to sea.

From the poop Sir Oliver watched the Spaniard. He saw her veer a point or so to starboard, heading straight to intercept them, and he observed that although this maneuver brought her fully a point nearer to the wind than the *Swallow*, yet, equipped as she was with half as much canvas again as Captain Leigh's piratical craft, she was gaining steadily upon them none the less.

The skipper came back to the poop, and stood there moodily watching that other ship's approach, cursing himself for having sailed into such a trap, and cursing his mate more fervently still.

Sir Oliver meanwhile took stock of so much of the *Swallow's* armament as was visible and wondered what like were those on the main-deck below. He dropped a

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question on that score to the captain, dispassionately, as though he were no more than an indifferently interested spectator, and with never a thought to his position aboard.

"Should I be racing her afore the wind if I was properly equipped?" growled Leigh. "Am I the man to run before a Spaniard? As it is I do no more than lure her well away from land."

Sir Oliver understood, and was silent thereafter. He observed a bo'sun and his mates staggering in the waist under loads of cutlases and small arms which they stacked in a rack about the mainmast. Then the gunner, a swarthy, massive fellow, stark to the waist with a faded scarf tied turban-wise about his head, leaped up the companion to the brass carronade on the larboard quarter, followed by a couple of his men.

Master Leigh called up the bo'sun, bade him take the wheel and dispatched the mate forward to the forecastle, where another gun was being prepared for action.

Thereafter followed a spell of racing, the Spaniard ever lessening the distance between them, and the land dropping astern until it was no more than a hazy line above the shimmering sea. Suddenly from the Spaniard appeared a little cloud of white smoke, and the boom of a gun followed, and after it came a splash a cable's length ahead of the *Swallow's* bows.

Linstock in hand, the brawny gunner on the poop stood ready to answer them when the word should be given. From below came the gunner's mate to report himself ready for action on the main-deck and to receive his orders.

Came another shot from the Spaniard, again across the bows of the *Swallow*.

" 'Tis a clear invitation to heave to," said Sir Oliver.

The skipper snarled in his fiery beard.

"She has a longer range than most Spaniards," said he. "But I'll not waste powder yet for all that. We've none to spare."

Scarcely had he spoken when a third shot boomed. There was a splintering crash overhead followed by a sough and a thud as the maintopmast came hurtling to the deck and in its fall stretched a couple of men in death. Battle was joined, it seemed. Yet Captain Leigh did nothing in a hurry.

"Hold there!" he roared to the gunner who swung his linstock at that moment in preparation.

She was losing way as a result of that curtailment of her mainmast, and the Spaniard came on swiftly now. At last the skipper accounted her near enough, and gave the word with an oath. The *Swallow* fired her first and last shot in that encounter. After the deafening thunder of it and through the cloud of suffocating smoke, Sir Oliver saw the high forecastle of the Spaniard rent open.

Master Leigh was cursing his gunner for having aimed too high. Then he signaled to the mate to fire the culverin of which he had charge. That second shot was to be the signal for the whole broadside from the main-deck below. But the Spaniard anticipated them. Even as the skipper of the *Swallow* signaled the whole side of the Spaniard burst into flame and smoke.

The *Swallow* staggered under the blow, recovered an instant, then listed ominously to larboard.

"——!" roared Leigh. "She's bilging!" and Sir Oliver saw the Spaniard standing off again, as if satisfied with what she had done.

The mate's gun was never fired, nor was the broadside from below. Indeed that sudden list had set the muzzles pointing to sea; within three minutes of it they were on a level with the water. The *Swallow* had received her death-blow and she was settling down.

Satisfied that she could do no further harm, the Spaniard luffed and hove to, awaiting the obvious result and intent upon picking up what slaves she could to man the galleys of his Catholic Majesty on the Mediterranean.

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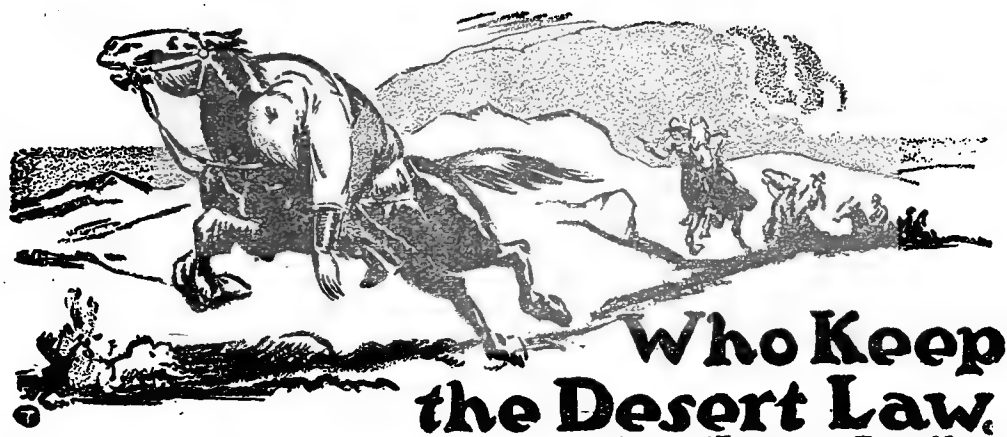

# Who Keep the Desert Law

by Nictzin Dyalhis

BEN MALLOCK was a hardboiled guy, a *malo hombre*. This was freely conceded by all the bootleggers, dope-runners, soldiers-of-fortune and the rest of the floating riffraff which infests the Border in these days of prohibition north of and revolutions south of the international line.

Twenty-eight years of life and ten thousand years old in knowledge of sin and depravity, with a temper resembling that of a bobcat with a sore tooth; tall, lanky, suntanned and wind-bitten of features; eyes a cold, dead-fish gray, and mouth like a rat-trap, he inspired the same set of emotions in the average beholder as would a stick of dynamite, a rattlesnake and a hydrophobia skunk, were all three rolled into one.

And he knew it. Also, he prided himself on living up to his looks.

Eventually he went into Mexico and joined the insurrectos.

Those who knew him sighed with relief. He would most likely get himself killed good and dead, and the Border would be that much improved.

And this very thing happened in due time and season.

But before he left this world of sorrow and vale of wo, via a firing-squad and a sun-baked adobe wall, he revisited the land of his nativity unknown to any of his acquaintances. . . .

OLD Inez Chachalaka wove the finest and most artistically designed baskets made by any Pima squaw in Arizona. Which is saying much, for the Pimas are the best basket-makers on earth. Brunson the trader says it, and he should know. He buys enough of them—at a profit to Brunson. Never mind about the Pimas—who cares if they get an adequate recompense or not?

Once a basket was bought from the maker for the enormous price of two dollars and fifty cents—and later that same basket was sold by the original purchaser for the mere trifle of one thousand six hundred dollars; and the trader's argument ran something like this—

"Well, she didn't *have* to sell it, did she?"

Of course not! But if the good kind Brunson stopped buying from her, where else could poor Inez dispose of her worthless baskets?

What did she know of the big towns of Phoenix and Tucson, where tourists go wild over the rarely beautiful specimens of the arts and crafts of the "First Americans"—usually referred to as "them —— Injuns."

And so old Inez wove her baskets and Brunson bought them—but there was one occasion whereon Brunson paid full value for his baskets.

INEZ was running short of material. So she took her flea-bitten gray burro, tied a can of water on his pack-saddle and set forth to gather more.

Some stunt, too, for Inez *was* old. Eighty-six years of the desert suns and winds had dried her to a mere wisp of humanity. She might have measured five feet two erect, but bent by age she stood nearer four feet eight. And she was so thin she had to stand



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twice in the same place at noon on a sunny day in order to cast a good shadow.

Yet her coal-black eyes were bright, lustrous and kindly, and her leathery old face, crisscrossed by a myriad of tiny lines, could crack into a most infectious grin on little provocation.

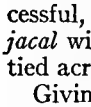
Her simple preparations completed, she troubled not at all to close and fasten the door of her *jacal*.

Why should she? There was nothing in the tiny hut worth lugging away, and her nearest neighbor dwelt over two miles distant.

Late in the afternoon, wearied but successful, she turned her steps toward the *jacal* with a healthy-sized bundle of grasses tied across the burro's back.

Giving him a light whack of her stick, she commanded in the soft Pima tongue—

"Lazy One, think upon the cool water in the spring behind the *jacal* and hasten thy steps."



ABOUT nine o'clock in the morning of that same day, south of the line, a prowling band of insurrectos blundered into a detachment of federals, and in the argument which followed got the worst of it.

So much so that one of their number—none other than Ben Mallock, the hard-boiled—pointed his pony's nose in the direction of the north pole and drifted, followed by a half-dozen riders who annoyed him by taking frequent shots at him.

Despite this he reached the Border and crossed it safely, unobserved by even a Border-patrol—and just then one of his pursuers, unquestionably a short sport, threw down on him with his carbine as a peevish farewell. Ben Mallock was out of luck, for the .30-30 took him fairly under the short-ribs low on his left side and drilled clear through.

Don't ask why it didn't kill him—it didn't!

He rode a mile before he stopped and bandaged roughly the two holes, front and back; then, setting his rat-trap of a mouth in an even grimmer line and fighting down a desire to let go and die where he was, he started on again, still holding due north.

In an hour he was delirious from sun and loss of blood, shouting, singing, spurring his mount cruelly whenever the dementia took the form of fearing pursuit, at other times relapsing into silence, drifting into vague states of semiconsciousness—yet through it all somehow, despite wounds, exhaustion and delirium, managing to stick to his saddle until well along toward sundown, when exhausted nature usurped command and he tumbled sidewise from his seat to the ground and lay there, to all appearance dead.

And thus old Inez found him, and but a few paces away his horse, lying down, saddle and all, too wearied even to wander in search of feed.

Her bright eyes softened pityingly at the sight, and she murmured sadly:

"Him dead! Too bad!"

A faint moan came from the prostrate form. Instantly she sprang into action. Unslinging the water-can from the burro, she set to work, and presently a faint, tired voice demanded profanely—

"Whar the —— am I, an' who the —— are you?"

"Arizona," she cackled happily, "an' me Inez Chachalaka. Mebbe me catch you' hoss, s'pose you ride?"

"Oh, ——!" he groaned. "I got to. I can't stay here. Whar you aimin' to take me?"

"Take you my *jacal* firs'; then byme-by——"

She hardly knew herself what next, so from words she turned to deeds again.

Catching the horse by the bridle and using a liberal application of stick, she persuaded him to his feet and led him to where Ben lay watching her out of pain-dimmed eyes.

Somehow, between them both they achieved the miracle of getting him astride the pony. Once up, he had barely strength left to whisper—

"Better — take — my — rope — an' — tie—me—on—" before his senses again deserted him.

It was midnight when they finally reached the *jacal*, with the injured man rather more dead than alive, but Inez promptly got as busy as if it were broad daylight.

The dirty shirt and blood-stained bandages were cut away, the raw, gaping holes thoroughly cleansed and filled with a decoction brewed from a bunch of herbs selected from among many similar bundles depending from a pole in the thatch of the hut, and a drink, also brewed from herbs, was poured a little at a time down his throat. Then, rebandaged and resting easier, he was

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gently moved to her own bed of dried grasses and burlap sacks and covered with her one and only blanket—a cheap, sleazy, sadly worn thing, which she skilfully tucked in in such manner that he could not displace it nor roll off even if he tried.

Then only did the old woman take thought for herself.

After a meal which might have done very well as a hand-out for a hobo—provided one wished to discourage the hobo from ever coming again—she went outside and returned with an armful of grasses which she shook out for a mattress, and, covering herself with two old gunny-sacks, she too drifted off to sleep.

In the gray of the dawn she awoke, and again her first thought was for the wounded man, afterward for herself.

After his wounds were again dressed and she had broken her fast, she went forth until beyond sight of the *jacal*. Finally, in a small open space hidden in the heart of a heavy thicket of chaparral, she squatted down beside a little cactus shaped like a grapefruit covered with spines.

Digging her fingers into the loose soil, she lifted with a grunt. Any one watching would have seen that she had hold of two wire handles, one gripped in each hand.

Up came a shallow tin box in which the cactus had been planted.

Inez was drawing on her bank.

The cactus in its box, once the sand was kicked naturally about it, made perfect camouflage. Who would suspect that under a cactus apparently growing wild she had her scanty hoard of coins?

It was a typical Indian trick.

Plunging her hand into the hole, she drew forth a small bag of greasy hide tied with a still dirtier rag.

Unwrapping this, she emptied the contents into her lap.

The poor, pitiful handful would scarce have sufficed to pay a white woman for a single day's toil at the most menial of tasks; yet it represented a month's labor to the aged maker of baskets.

There was a solitary, tattered one-dollar bill, a fifty-cent piece, three quarters and a few dimes and nickels. Several times she looked lovingly and longingly at the bill—once, indeed, she tucked it back in the little bag and replaced it in the hole, then snatched it out again, chiding herself fiercely.

Replacing the covering box with its cactus in the hole, she craftily removed all trace of disturbance and returned hastily to the *jacal*. Catching and saddling the burro, she took the trail to the trader's store.

Here in place of the usual beans and coffee she bought cans of milk and pounds of rice, spending her last penny with a reckless abandon quite unlike her usual thrifty pricing and bargaining, for she was for once in a hurry. Then, to Brunson's utter amazement, she calmly asked for credit for a number of yards of white cotton cloth. Her demand for credit was not what surprized him—old Inez was honest, a virtue he could and did admire in others—but why did she buy white goods? In his experience an Indian's taste invariably ran to gaudy calico prints, the more flamboyant the better. And when she added soap to her indebtedness . . . .

"Well!" he thought. "She shore is gittin' feeble-minded!"

But he humored the old crone—he could afford to.

FOR three weeks the old woman nursed her self-imposed burden, drawing heavily on her lore of herbs and native surgery, and for three weeks her patient hovered on the brink of life and death, with one foot in the grave and the other one on the edge.

But at no time did Inez permit that other foot to slip.

He was never delirious and never feverish, thanks to her decoctions, although during all that period he never fully awoke—also due to decoctions, which at the first sign of restlessness she would pour down his throat.

At intervals she fed him rice and milk boiled to a thin gruel, raising him to a sitting position and supporting him against her frail, withered breast, spooning the gruel a little at a time into his mouth and laying him back as gently as any trained nurse.

Finally came a day when she omitted the soporific, and late that afternoon he opened his eyes.

Hazily at first, then with wonderment, he took in the surroundings, his tired eyes coming to a halt on the face of his preserver.

"Hello, gran'maw!" he grinned feebly.

"H'l'o!" she chuckled, attempting in her joy at his improvement to crack a jest. "You no dead yet?"

"Danged nigh it!" he replied wearily.



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Then added gratefully, "If I ain't dead, it's because you——"

He choked and his eyes filled with the easy tears of the physically prostrated—the first Ben Mallock had ever known in all his bitter, evil life.

"——!" he exclaimed venomously. "I shore must be sick!"

Inez grabbed up the battered tin cup holding the soporific.

"Here!" she commanded. "You drink an' shut up!"

"Yo're the boss!" he assented, and obeyed. "But what I want to know," he resumed drowsily, "is—how—long—have—I—"

His words died in an incoherent mutter, and he drifted off into a quiet, easy sleep.

The next day he was quite himself, aside from a perfectly natural weakness, and he watched with interest the dressing of his wound. It was still a long way from being healed, but it was safely on the road.

"My great cats!" he mused. "Thar's not a doctor in Arizony could better her work! Me, I shore revises my opinion of all Injuns!"

His recovery from that time on was rapid, for despite a life of dissipation and self-indulgence he had been active and had a constitution correspondingly rugged.

Again and again he questioned "gran'-maw," as he half-affectionately, half-sardonically called her, as to how she had found him; why she had burdened herself with him; how she had bought his food and bandages and medicines; and, above all else, why she had not simply turned him over to some white man—for instance, the sheriff, that refuge of any one in any kind of quandary. To which interrogations, old Inez returned a stolid, "Dunno!" and shifted the topic to something else whenever possible.

Eventually he was permitted to leave his bed and sit in the doorway, where he watched "gran'maw's" deft fingers working, working, always working at her everlasting basketry.

One day she glanced up, gazed intently for a moment, then turned abruptly to him.

"You like gran'maw?" she queried earnestly.

"Shore do!" he drawled lazily. "Why, want me to *marry* you?"

Inez failed to see the joke. She had other things on her mind.

"Trader comin'," she explained hurriedly. "You hide inside. No wan' him see you. Go *pronto!*"

"Huh!" he grunted, and vanished.

Ensconcing himself in the darkest corner of the hut and covering himself with gunny-sacks, he lay quiet.

"Dang 'f I know why should I hide out thisaway," he thought, resentfully. Then, "But if it pleases the old woman, it's the least I kin do."

Then a motor stopped before the *jacal* and a harsh voice came to his listening ears.

"Hey, Inez! Git out your baskets. I'm in a hurry an' ain't got time to fool 'round all day! Let's see what you got!"

Ben felt his temper beginning to boil. Decidedly he did not approve the bullying tone nor the insolent manner of the unseen trader.

To himself he reflected.

"If I was well, I'd go pilin' out thar an' climb his hump! As it is——"

Realization of his helplessness caused him to grit his teeth and bite his lips so that they bled.

And he, "a fighting fool," as he called himself, had to lie still and hear the only human being who had ever showed him kindness talked to as he would never in his ugliest moments have talked to a dog.

Then and there, a rancorous, bitter hatred was born for that trader, and Ben knew from of old that where he hated, soon or late, he struck—once. That was usually sufficient.

To be sure, he had his six-gun—the heavy, ugly, single-action frontier model Colt .45—and, despite his weakened condition and shaking hands, he had no fear of possible consequences to himself—but to kill—here—at the very door of the old woman's *jacal*—would inevitably bring trouble upon "gran'maw," which would be but a poor return for saving his life. Besides, he most ardently desired to get his hands on the owner of that voice and beat his face into an unrecognizable pulp.

His mind switched abruptly from this pleasing contemplation to the conversation going on outside.

"That's the best I'll do! Take it or leave it! Market's 'way down an' times is harder'n ——, an' towerists is scarcer'n hen's teeth! Well?"

"All right," sighed Inez, "me take! But plenty little money for too much work!"

"Ah, you're lucky to git that!" growled the trader. "Well, I gotta be gittin' along.

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So long, Inez. I'll be 'round some of these days for more."

The self-starter whirred, and the car rapidly departed.

Ben passed to the door, peered cautiously, then stepped outside.

"How much did that skunk give you fer yo're baskets?" he demanded.

The old woman glanced up craftily, but one sight of the grim, white face and blazing eyes caused her to reply hastily and truthfully.

"Twal' dolla'; see?"

She held the money out to him in her withered brown hands.

"Twelve dollars!" he fairly howled. "Why, the dang—"

"Uh-huh!" she nodded; "but me owe him eight dolla' for grub—make twanny dolla' for basket."

"Twenty dollars fer all them purty baskets? Why, dang it all, ain't you got *no* sense?" he exclaimed wonderingly.

"Plenty sense!" she affirmed; not without a quaint dignity. "But me no take, how you goin' git well?"

Ben gasped, then swore. True enough, what else could be done? He did not at that moment especially admire himself. In fact, he remembered painfully that the night before he became wounded, he had lost over two hundred dollars—American gold at that—at monte, and the thought of all it would have done for this patient, kindly old Pima squaw made him writhe inwardly.

Abruptly he turned on his heel, went inside, flopped on his bed and lay there hating himself.

FOR two weeks longer he busied himself getting well, meanwhile saying little and thinking much.

Then one morning—

"Gran'maw!" he demanded. "Whar's my hoss—or am I afoot?"

"Hoss safe 'nough," she assured him. "Why?"

"I want him," he returned briefly. "Whar's he at?"

"You no fin' him if me tell you," she replied.

"Well, go git him then!" he commanded.

With the unquestioning obedience of the Indian woman when the dominant male issues orders she struck off into the chaparral, to return shortly, leading a well-fed, clear-eyed, quick-stepping animal totally unlike the gaunt, tired beast he remembered riding during his flight from Mexico.

While he threw the saddle on, she gazed with a queer look in her eyes—then hesitatingly laid her hand on his arm and peered up into his face.

"You goin' leave ol' gran'maw?" she quavered.

He looked her straight in the eye.

"Naw!" he smiled reassuringly. "I ain't never goin' to leave you! Jest goin' to ride some an' git my stren'th back. That's all."

"Good!" she grinned happily. "Hurry back!"

"Danged if she ain't adopted me fer keeps!" he muttered, swinging himself into the saddle.

A few days of this, and he felt himself fully competent again. Also, he felt himself a useless burden on the old basket-maker. He must recompense her for all her goodness, that was certain, but how? Naturally, with money.

Late one afternoon, as he was riding back to the *jacal*, he heard a subdued wailing emanating from a spot somewhere to his right in the chaparral. The voice was that of "gran'maw."

Dismounting and leaving the reins dragging, he stole as silently as a stalking Apache in the direction whence came the sounds.

In the center of a little open space sat old Inez, and before her lay her burro, dead.

Stepping to her side, he dropped his heavy hand on her shoulder.

"What's the matter now?" he asked inanely.

"Burro—him dead!" she wailed, pointing.

"Yeh," he replied; "but what'd he die of?"

"Dunno;" she shrugged. "Jus' dead, tha's all!"

For a moment he stood pondering. This was too much. It was for him to bestir himself and requite her for all she had done for him, and, furthermore, to do it promptly.

Suddenly his eyes lighted up. He had found his inspiration.

Again laying his hand on her shoulder, he said as gently as lay in his nature to speak:

"Gran'maw, I'm a-goin' fer a long ride. May be gone several days. May be back before mornin'. Can't tell. Meantime, you quit fussin'! 'At burro's dead! You can't bring him to life ag'in by howlin'

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about it! Go back to the *jacal* an' fergit him! So-long!"

He turned to go.

"No leave ol' gran'maw," she quavered, holding out her shaking hands to him in pathetic appeal. "No go an' leave ol' Inez all 'lone."

"Dang it!" he snapped impatiently. "I got to go! Ain't I jest told you I'm comin' back ag'in? G'wan back to the *jacal* an' wait. Things ain't so bad as they looks!"

Without further words he turned and strode away.

She gazed after him disconsolate. This was too much, all on the same day. The burro had been her friend and companion and helper for years. She had raised him from an awkward, spraddling colt. No hand save hers had ever packed him. None saving herself had ever fed him or rubbed his long, sensitive ears and soft, velvety nose.

She had never been obliged to hunt for him over half the map. Every morning he came to the *jacal* in the dawning, and every night he was to be found at, or near, the water-hole. And now—he was dead.

And just at this one time when she urgently craved companionship and needed it with every fiber of her being, Ben had gone for a long ride.

Wearily she rose and dejectedly shuffled back to the hut.

BRUNSON looked up from his books as the door flew open. A hard-faced rider entered the store and stood gazing about at the varied assortment of Indian curios.

"I was just about to close," hinted the trader.

"All right, mister," replied his visitor; "I don't aim to keep you long. I want to git an Injun basket or two fer my kid sister what's at school in the East."

"Ah, yes; baskets."

Brunson took down a number of them tied together by a rope—these being none other than the ones purchased from old Inez.

"Huh!" grunted the customer. "I don't *sabe* these footy things much, but what'll you take fer the lot?"

"For the lot?" The trader's voice was gently reproving. "Why, my dear sir, those baskets, as they are, are worth over three thousand dollars!"

"They be, huh? An' just what did you pay fer 'em?"

The intruder's tones were guileless—a trifle too much so—and Brunson became slightly nettled. Evidently this fellow was getting inquisitive.

"I don't see that that's any of your business!" he snapped.

"But it is!" retorted the other in a rasping voice.

Brunson gasped—he was looking into the muzzle of a Colt .45, and over the barrel blazed a pair of eyes which spelled one word—murder.

Automatically his hands flew above his head, while he tried to bluff the matter out.

"You put that cannon up," he spluttered. "You can't get away with that old-time stuff these days! You'll——"

"Shet yore face!" came the command. "You danged thief, you made every blasted cent you ever got a-robbin' Injuns, an' you got no kick comin'! I'm a-robbin' you straight out-an'-out an' takin' my chances—but you—you— Turn yore back!"

Brunson obeyed meekly. He had no choice. In less than a minute he was tied hand and foot and dumped into a chair.

The hold-up passed back of the counter, wrenched open the cash-drawer, emptied it and returned to his captive.

"Here, you," he snarled, "I'm a-goin' to frisk you! That ain't half enough!"

Deftly he went through the trader's pockets, finding in an inner one, as reward of industry, a fat wallet.

"That's a whole lot better!" he grunted. "Now, Injun-robber, I reckon I'll leave you to meditate some on yore sins!"

Brunson suddenly found his voice.

"You dirty thief," he choked, "if you was any kind of a man, you'd untie me an' give me an even break."

An unholy light leaped up in the hold-up's eyes.

"Why, you makes a noise what I likes to hear!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Give you a even break? I shore will do that very thing! I'll be back in a minute!"

And he vanished through the door.

Returning shortly, he announced:

"Injun-robber, I got a pony tied outside. I've tied yore money an' my gun to the saddle. If you proves the better *hombre*, you goes an' gits 'em. If not, you loses; *sabe?*"

Releasing Brunson, he stepped back, the unholy light still flickering and dancing in his icy gray eyes.

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"Git onto yore feet, feller," he invited grimly, "an' take the dangest lickin' you ever got!"

Brunson rather prided himself on being a man of his hands. Besides, he weighed a good twenty pounds more than his antagonist, and he had noted that the other, though unmistakably a Border-rider, was pale and showed evidences of having recently been ill.

With a cat-like leap he came to his feet and struck at the pale, mocking face—but the face suddenly moved.

A shattering wallop landed full on the angle of his jaw—another smashed squarely into his features, smearing mouth and nose into one ensanguined blur—then, like two strokes of lightning, first on the right cheek, then on the left, flat, horny-palmed hands smote. The strokes maddened him. Flinging all ideas of scientific fighting to the discard, he tried to grapple with his tantalizer —and succeeded. It might have been better for him had he failed.

For a minute there was a furious tangle of arms and legs which abruptly terminated. The hold-up came to his feet grasping the trader in a peculiarly tortuous position. Yanking him over into a corner of the room, he jammed him face down across a barrel which lay overturned.

Then, seizing a piece of the barrel-head . . .

There is nothing—not even the most hideous form of death—that can so utterly humiliate a grown man as a good, old-fashioned spanking, scientifically administered. And this was a top-notcher.

"Thar, you two-legged polecat," grunted his castigator, releasing the limp form of his victim; "you wanted a even break, huh? Well, you got it, feller; you shore got it!"

Without waiting for reply or comment he dashed out the door, and the sound of a rapidly departing horse came fainter and fainter to Brunson's dazed hearing.

THE longer old Inez sat solitary in the gloom of the *jacal*, the more despondent she became. Never in all her eighty-six years had life seemed so completely empty and worthless.

She sighed heavily, rose, collected a bundle of small sticks and, taking a small bag in her hand, went out into the fast gathering dusk.

A few yards from the door she kindled a tiny fire, and as it blazed up she threw from time to time small pinches of some aromatic powdered gum from the bag into the flames.

She was making prayer to the ancient gods of her people.

"O Great Desert Fathers," she pleaded, "Inez is very weary. Her heart is empty. The man I found has gone from me in my hour of need, and my burro is dead. Let Inez go to her rest in the Land-Above-The-Stars."

Throwing sand on the fire, she reentered the *jacal* and soon drifted off to sleep.

She was awakened in the dawning by a well-known voice shouting:

"Ho, gran'maw! Come a-runnin'!"

Emerging, she faced a grinning, transmogrified Ben, who promptly spread a huge and not too clean bandanna kerchief on the ground, upon which he piled a heap of currency and a fat wad of bills.

"All yourn, gran'maw!" he chuckled. "Some bunch o' jack, huh?"

Wide-eyed, she stared at him, barely noticing the money.

"Where you get?" she demanded.

"Aw!" he evaded. "What's the dif'?"

"No good!" she asserted emphatically.

His exultation collapsed.

"Looky here, gran'maw," he pleaded, like an overgrown boy attempting to justify himself for some peccadillo, "I goes over an' sees that dang trader—he's robbed you ag'in an' ag'in on yore baskets—we had a li'l' ruckus an' I come away with this——"

He broke off in amazement.

Inez had emitted an unearthly screech!

She dived into the *jacal*, flew forth again brandishing a long, rusty knife, and with surprizing agility, considering her age, she commenced whirling around him and the pile of money, chanting some weird and uncanny song.

He grabbed her.

"Hol' on!" he expostulated. "What's bitin' you? What fer a way is that to behave? What you doin', anyhow?"

"War-dance!" she whooped in a joyous frenzy. "You take war-trail for ol' gran'-maw! Make fight! Come back—plenty plunder— —— fine! You *warrior!*"

"Nothin' to it!" he gasped feebly as she twisted from his grip and resumed her gyrations. "First thing I know she's liable to elect me the Big White Chief of the whole Pima nation! Whew!"

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Then he caught her again.

"Here, quit!" he commanded. "Hide that money! You hear me! Don't never let that trader know you got it! He might come an' take it from you when I wasn't here! *Sabe?*"

She nodded comprehensive agreement.

"Now I got my hand in," he resumed, "I'm a-goin' to prowl over into Mexico after that jasper what plugged me."

And again she nodded agreement. This was as it should be—to seek your enemy and exact reprisal. What did she know or care for the law of the white men that causes the sheriff to hunt him who dares to take by the might of the strong hand?

To himself Ben muttered—

"The way I covered my tracks last night I'll never be traced here, so she's safe enough—I'll eat an' drift an' if I'm lucky I kin make the line before the news gits around!"

An hour later he mounted and rode toward Mexico, knowing full well that certain death awaited him there, should he ever be recognized.

INEZ watched him ride away, her heart so swelling with her pride in him that she felt as if she would burst.

Then her glance fell on the money he had left.

Taking up the cloth by the corners, she carried it into the hut.

Here she counted it, her eyes shining—not with greed and avarice but with a simple gladness quite apart from sordid considerations.

Judged by white man standards, it was little enough—some three hundred and forty-odd dollars, but by her standards, amply sufficient to maintain her in luxury hitherto undreamed of, for all the balance of her life. Another burro. Two burros! And a goat! And, crowning joy, a couple of hens and a rooster!

Very evidently the gods of the ancient days had heard her supplication.

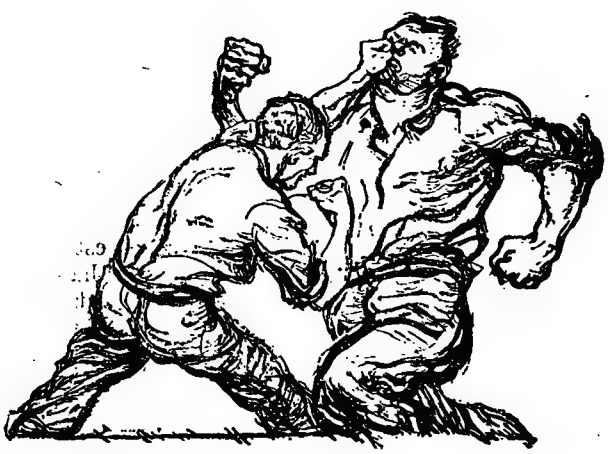
She hastened outside and kindled the prayer-fire and sprinkled the sacred gum on the flames, murmuring as she nodded to a tall "dust-devil" that suddenly lifted from the ground some fifty yards away:

"Now, as ever, the Mighty Ones of the Desert care for those who abide by the Law They left for mankind to follow, 'As ye deal by the stranger in his need, so shall we in thy day of distress provide.' It is well!"

The "dust-devil" whirled past the *jacal* and vanished far out on the desert—but to the eyes of old Inez Chachalaka it was no whirlicue of dust, but a being of supermortal grandeur, crowned with a gleaming aureole of scintillant sand-sparkles, and with a look of loving approval in the kindly shining eyes.

Ah, well! Perhaps it *was* the Desert Fathers who so provided for old Inez of the tender heart.

Who shall claim otherwise?



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# When a Witch-Doctor Loves

## By Santie Sabalala

*Author of "Mamoti, the Witch-Woman," "Pointed Teeth," etc.*

UPINA smiled at his youngest child, Madubule (Keen-sight), who was the twin born of Malanga. His mother had been sentenced to be eaten alive by the ants for bewitching his twin sister three years past.

Upina had just finished teaching the young bull, as he called him, the first steps of the war-dance. The lesson was satisfactory to both father and infant son. That Upina was fond of his child was more than evident. There are two things that a native loves—his children and a large herd of cattle. Wo betide him who hurts either!

In the past three years since the death of his wife, Upina had risen to power and influence, by well-merited services in the council and battle-raids. He had an immense herd of cattle, and his word was law not only in the kraal that he dwelt in, but over a certain given district as authorized by the king.

The second wife, who had been given to Upina after the first raid he had taken part in, was still the only woman in his household. The older men at the council meetings pointed out to him that this was not the way a powerful *induna* should live. He should have, they said, at least a half-dozen women in his household and have a large brood of children.

Upina gave different answers. Some to the effect that he was busy with his young bull (son), or that his *qwaṣa* farms took up all his time. After these verbal encounters, he would go away and brood about Malanga for a while, and then forget entirely about it in the general life of the kraal.

It so happened that a messenger arrived at the kraal where Upina lived, and announced that the king was holding a song festival, in honor of his brother's marriage. As always this occasion was to be turned into a tribal holiday; games and races were to be the order of the day.

Upina called in the services of one of the many kraal barbers, or hair-dressers, who worked on his head three days and fashioned a very high head-dress. The fashion was guaranteed to be in "mode" for the next six moons, after which it would be absolutely imperative to have the whole head shaved, because of the accumulation of live stock in the interval. The "dressing" is not disturbed and remains intact. When sleep is sought the head does not rest on the floor as is the usual custom, but on a wooden pedestal, or pillar, that fits the column of the neck. Thus vanity is served!

On the fourth day when his decorations were satisfactory, and his wonderful body had been rubbed with fat till it shone, Upina sallied forth in quest of his favorite trained oxen, of which he had three. When about three hundred yards away from his herd he gave a peculiar whistle. A piebald ox left the herd and came dancing towards him. He put it through the different paces and steps that he had taught it. The beast responded well and accurately to all his commands, and he then ordered it back to the herd, and was obeyed.



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He made his way back to the kraal and his own hut where his wife awaited him. No sooner had he given her permission to speak than she shrilled and screamed at him for not taking any notice of her four children. Unable to stand the shrewish woman's noise any longer, Upina roared out—

"You, woman, shut up!" and there was peace.

TWO days before the great event, Upina journeyed to the main kraal with his favorite ox. Being a man of means and power he had to help out in the different arrangements of games, racing and roasting of beeves. The king greeted him cordially, as the men of the council did also. Upina was busy right up to the morning of the great day. The people streamed into the kraal bearing gifts for the king and for his brother that was to be married. The first day was given over to eating and drinking also dancing which lasted well up into the morning of the second day.

The oracle orator of the king's kraal announced that the ox-racing and dancing would be held at high noon on the veld, at a specially selected spot. Long before noon came the designated spot was crowded with spectators and owners of the trained oxen. The cattle were driven to their appointed places and put through their paces by their owners.

The oxen were of different sizes and colors. Several of them called forth excited comment. Upina's piebald, fleet-footed ox; a brick-red cow that belonged to the king, and a dun-colored bull with a magnificent pair of horns were the favorites.

At last the dancing of the cattle came to an end. After they had rested a while the race would be run. In the mean time the boys exhibited their prowess at spear-play and the other war-like sports.

Upina called to his son who was playing with a group of boys. When the little chap came to his father's side, Upina led him to the piebald ox and lifted him on to the beast's back, handed him a short switch and warned him that he, Upina, expected the ox to win. His son flashed on him a white-toothed smile and said he would. There was a shout by the warrior, who had this part of the festivities under his charge, for the cattle to be on their way to the starting-point of the race—about a mile away.

The twoscore or more racing-cattle started away. The king's ox was ridden by one of his young nephews, and the dun-colored bull by a wide-faced Kwekwe. Upina's piebald favorite by his son, Madubule.

Shouting and laughing in their sheer enjoyment and excitement, the riders lined up the oxen for the race. The master of ceremonies cleared his throat, walked in front of the assembled beasts eyeing them and their riders with a keen, hard, fearsome eye. Here he pushed an ox back and told the boy to sit up further on the ox, informing him that he was not a *gira*, or witch-doctor. At this joke all the riders laughed heartily.

At last everything was as he wanted it, and with a grand sweep of his right arm, the starter held the attention of the ox-riders.

"*Boom! Boom! Boom!*" a war-drum throbbed out. There was a shout of, "*Hambani!*" (Go!) The starter dropped his arm; young, pink, heels thudded against two score ox-ribs, and the cattle got under way with a lazy trot. The shouts of those on foot excited the oxen and a few seconds later the herd broke in a gallop.

A cream colored cow put a foot into the hole of a wild-cat, broke its leg, and went floundering to the ground. The rider was tossed clear into the air and landed on a rock head-first, with such force that his neck was broken.

The whole racing crew of boys and oxen were tangled up as they piled on top of each other. The riders screamed as they were pinned and gored by the frightened cattle. The bellowing of maddened bulls—a bedlam of sounds—filled the air. As the people rushed forward to rescue the boys the master of ceremonies strode up impatiently and thrust aside the people who got in his path.

He attempted to pull a bull out of the struggling mass by its legs, and received a tremendous kick in his stomach which made the sweat break out on his face and body and mixed up all the food he had eaten for the past forty-eight hours. A strong bronzed hand got hold of him and flung him aside. A tall form strode forward shouting commands to the excited men. They obeyed his orders instantly.

The excited clamor died down. Boys more frightened than hurt, bawling loudly, were lifted out from the seething tangled mass of cattle, horns, and kicking legs. The oxen found to be injured seriously—such as

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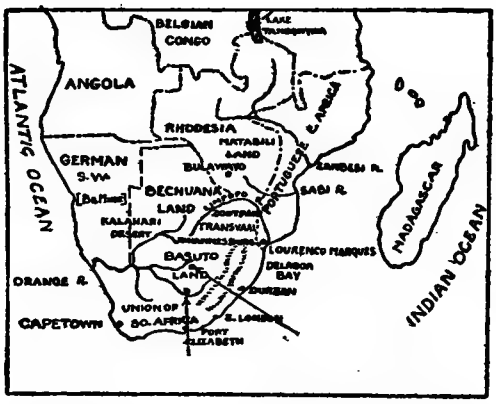
a broken leg or foot—were killed there and then. When all the mess had been cleared away, it was discovered that two boys had been squashed to death and a third gored in the side—his entrails were hanging out. He was conscious and whined softly like a dog shivering in the cold.

The tall man walked to the boy, his arms folded, looked down on him and spoke. The boy ceased his crying and writhed in his agony. The man unfolded his arms. In the silence his voice boomed a question and a command;

"Who has a bone-needle? I would sew up the wound in this boy."

There was a commotion among the people, and a second later some one handed to the man a needle. As he took it the man rasped out the order, "Bring some water."

A boy went away on the run to fill this command. In a comparatively short time he was back with a large calabash filled




with water. The strong-faced man walked over to one of the recently killed oxen and, with the help of several men, dragged it out of the way. He then pulled several strands of hair from its tail, threaded his bone-needle with one of these hairs, and went back to the pain-racked boy.

He knelt by the injured boy, and, turning him over, poured a good measure of water over the exposed entrails—washing the dirt from them—after which he gently forced them back into the body. The boy gnashed his teeth and frothed at the mouth. He whimpered now and then—but never loudly. The man began to sew the broken flesh together, with the bone-needle and hair from the tail of the dead bull.

When the work was done, the boy was covered with perspiration. The man then looked around at the crowd of people and put this question to them—

"Whose child is this?"

A strapping fine girl stepped out and informed him—

"It is my brother."

"Take him away from here," she was commanded.

No sooner were the words spoken, than several men eagerly stepped forth to take up the boy—Upina was one of them. The man who had acted the part of surgeon bent down and put his hand under the boy's back. Upina, in advance of the other men, grabbed hold of the boy's ankles.

"Let go," growled the man.

"Never," replied Upina.

They tugged and see-sawed the boy's body between them until the girl rushed up to them and begged that they cease.

"That dog must let him down first," said the witch-doctor.

"You are the offspring of a baboon," retorted Upina.

The witch-doctor's eyes blazed as he thundered out—

"Give me a stick!"

A stick was thrust into his right hand, even as another was thrust in Upina's, and they let the boy fall to the ground. He cried aloud with pain.

"Stand away! Stand away! Blood is going to be spattered!" exclaimed the bold-faced man as he thrust the people back.

Guard-sticks were given to the two angry men.

Upina shouted the old challenge—

"*Umgenil*"

He was answered with the counter-challenge—

"Bring all you have," and the fight was on.

Upina took the fight to his opponent, who stopped him for a moment by hitting Upina's guard-stick so hard that it stung his folded hand. This gave the witch-doctor the desired opening and swinging up his stick he hit Upina on the elbow of his guard, which was the left.

The stick fell to the ground as the arm was paralyzed by the sudden blow. The witch-doctor never let up for a minute, but swung shrewd blows on Upina's neck and arms, which he fenced off as well as he could. The crowd of watching people cheered them on. Upina poked his stick

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at his opponent's right eye. The witch-doctor leaned back to avoid the thrust and, quick as a flash, Upina swung his stick downward and hit him on the right ankle-bone. The witch-doctor collapsed and Upina struck his back until the sounds that came forth were like the booming of a mighty drum.

A commanding voice was heard above the blows and the protesting cries of the witch-doctor—

"Who is the kneeling drum?"

Upina ceased his beating and turned around to meet the smiling face of the king and Mafakati. The witch-doctor, now sitting on the ground, looked up. The king opened his eyes in astonishment, as he exclaimed:

"What! The great witch-doctor is beaten by an *induna?* What is the matter with your medicines?"

The crowd and Mafakati roared with laughter at the king's joke. When the hilarity had ceased, the king questioned the reason for the fight. Upina explained the cause of it. The king looked interested and remarked—

"I know the witch-doctor is in love with this girl," pointing to the girl in question. She fluttered her eyelids shyly.

The witch-doctor, his secret amour laid bare by his ruler, dug his heel deeply in the ground, put his thumb in his mouth, swaying his body right and left. The assembled people roared in delight, slapping each other on the shoulder. Upina looked around and seeing the boy still lying on the ground, went over and picked him up. The witch-doctor on seeing this service done by his enemy for his loved one, glared terribly, and tried to get on his feet, but his ankle would not support him. With clenched jaws he watched Upina carry the boy to the kraal, followed closely by the girl. The young men jeered the witch-doctor, saying:

"Lying cripples are not wanted. Only broad-shouldered, strong-armed men, win the women."

The master of ceremonies, partly recovered from the powerful kick of the ox, with gray-green face and shaking steps, announced in a trembling voice that the race would be held two days hence. The people received this news with great surprize, then melted away toward the kraal with murmuring voices and beating drums. Boys' young, musical voices came chanting over the breeze. They were singing a popular song. The men hummed it as they cleared up the dead oxen. The witch-doctor scrambled to his feet and slowly limped towards his cave. The wind rustled in the trees—cooling the day's heat.

THE brass of the western sky turned gold—red—then faded blue. The song from the kraal rose to a shout as the witch-doctor reached home, then suddenly died away. Not a sound was to be heard as the sky turned black, but the stab of the throbbing pain in his ankle filled his world of sound. A snake came crawling on the floor of his hut, he reached for one of his fighting sticks and waited until he judged it was in striking distance. A few seconds passed; then he struck.

He went forward to the fireplace, knelt down and blew the white ashes away, so that the red embers glowed. He piled larger sticks of wood on the fire until he had a blaze that filled the cave. The witch-doctor went over to the reptile and a puzzled look of pain passed over his face, as he realized that he had killed one of his pet snakes. For a long moment he gazed down on the snake with a sorrowful expression on his face.

He limped to one corner and selected a skin from the bunch of hides he had there. It was tanned to the softness of a chamois skin. He opened it with the hairy side to the ground, and with a piece of charcoal traced the outline of his foot on it. This done, the witch-doctor dragged the whole bundle of furs and hides toward the fire. Taking out his knife and, using the tracing of his foot as a model, he began to make a pair of native sandals; shaping a piece here, and sewing it on there with his bone-needle. A smile of satisfaction crossed his face when his work was completed and two soft sandals stood side by side.

The witch-doctor leaned back and taking hold of the dead body of the reptile dragged it toward him and cut out one of its fangs with his dagger. This he planted in the heel of the right foot of the sandal, and sewed sinew-thread around it, so that it would be erect at all times. His labors completed he put the snake away from him, pulled the brands from the fire and lay down to sleep.

The sounds of revelry at the wedding in the kraal was borne to his ears.

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WHEN the sun was mid-high in the morning, the witch-doctor emerged from his cave with the sandals under his left arm, and the body of the dead snake wrapped around the end of the stick in his right hand. He followed the winding path that led from his cave to the kraal, and flung the reptile's body over the limb of a near-by tree.

Bands of young girls shuffled slowly past him. Their feet ached, for they had been dancing all night. One group the witch-doctor greeted and questioned how they enjoyed themselves the night before.

They opened their mouths to answer, but not a sound could they utter, for they had shouted themselves voiceless. The witch-doctor passed on. At the gate he met Upina, and surprized him by the very cordial way in which he greeted him.

"Yes, my friend," said the witch-doctor.

"I greet you," replied Upina.

"When are you going away?"

"I don't know. Certain matters are detaining me here," replied Upina, with a bashful smile.

The witch-doctor looked at him with glittering eyes. A second later he smiled and said:

"Your kraal is a long way from here. Here is a pair of sandals for you. They will save your feet."

"Thank you very greatly," Upina replied as he looked at the handsome sandals the witch-doctor handed him.

The witch-doctor walked on.

The witch-doctor knocked at the door of a certain hut, and a voice from within boomed—

"Enter."

He bent down, turned to the right, thrust his stick between his legs and half-haunched down.

"Ha, ha! So it is you, my friend. Come nearer to the fire," said the voice.

The witch-doctor did as requested with apparent pleasure and plunged into the business that brought him there so early in the morning. He wanted to know whether the head of the hut would let him marry his daughter, Nomyaka, when she became of age.

The father of Nomyaka replied:

"Nomyaka is my only child; she is boy and a girl to me. Upina is willing to give me twenty-five oxen for that girl. Upina will be a great chief."

"This is not all I have to say," said the witch-doctor with great wrath. "You talk like a child. Don't you know I am a great man *now?* I made it possible for Upina to be what he is. Besides, he will never marry your daughter; my power will stay him—I have cast a spell upon him."

The girl's father trembled, and murmured in frightened accents:

"Yes, yes! You are a great wizard. You can do anything you want to do."

"Where is Nomyaka?" the witch-doctor demanded.

"She has gone to the forest to get some firewood. She will be back at high noon," her father answered.

"I will give you thirty-two oxen for her," said the witch-doctor.

"My daughter has not said she loves you," replied the father half-timidly, for in spite of himself he was drawn towards Upina.

The witch-doctor glared at Nomyaka's father until the man shivered in fright, and smiled in a half-sick way.

There was a wailing outside, and the sound of runing feet. A fine girl dashed breathlessly into the hut. She looked at both men in mute appeal for permission to speak.

The witch-doctor and the other looked at her in great disapproval and went on with their discussion of the marriage. The girl shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. The figure of a middle-aged woman loomed in the door-way. It was Nomyaka's mother and she started speaking without permission. Said she—

"Nomyaka is dying."

"What! And this fool, this less than a fool, stands there and says nothing!" roared the witch-doctor and bounding to his feet he knocked the girl to the ground with a vicious blow of his knobkerrie.

Then, snatching his fur bag from the floor, he said harshly:

"What is it that injured her? Where is it? Speak! Speak woman! Hurry!"

"Upina gave her a nice pair of sandals," the woman answered maliciously. "Soon after putting them on she became ill."

The witch-doctor's eyes glittered strangely as he muttered to himself—

"The sandals! The sandals! The sandals!"

With a hoarse bellow he picked up another stick and to the surprize of the

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woman, and her frightened husband, dashed out of the hut.

At the gate of the stockade he collided with Upina, who was running towards the kraal and they both went sprawling to the ground. Upina regained his feet first, and went over to the witch-doctor.

"Nomyaka is dying," he said. "She is dying. Come and see her."

"You killed her, you dog," snarled the witch-doctor.

"What? I? You are mad!" Upina was astounded at the accusation.

"Where are the sandals?" questioned the witch-doctor.

"Nomyaka admired them, and I gave them to her," said Upina simply. Then his eyes opened wide as understanding came to him. With a flying leap he landed on the witch-doctor and they rolled about, struggling furiously, in the dust. Warriors and others hearing the scuffle ran up and parted them, and were surprized to know that the witch-doctor had again so belittled himself to fight with a common warrior.

Not waiting to explain anything, the witch-doctor started away on the path leading to the jungle with Upina close on his heels. The assembled warriors put their hands over their mouths, shook their heads, and shrugged their shoulders as they went back to the kraal. The witch-doctor was afraid of Upina after all, was their comment.

THE sound of wailing women guided the two racing men. The witch-doctor burst in on them and, thrusting them aside, knelt down beside the body of his heart's desire. Her face was no longer beautiful. It was bloated with poison. He pulled the sandals from her feet, and taking from his fur bag a sharp knife, sliced off the whole ball of the heel of the girl's right foot. The blood oozed out sluggishly; but flowed quicker as he kneaded the flesh of her calf.

He looked up for an instant, as a shadow fell across his hands, and saw Upina.

"Build a fire," he panted.

Upina, commanding the women to stop their wailing and gather some wood, obeyed, and in a short while he had made a hot, blazing fire.

The witch-doctor carried Nomyaka close to it in order to sweat the poison out of her. The small hairs on her body and limbs frizzled and crisped—but no moisture came. It was not until the smell of cooking flesh mingled with that of wood and smoke that the witch-doctor realized that Nomyaka was dead.

He dragged the body away from the fire, and looking at it intently stood directly over it, brought his hands together horizontally, and lifted them slowly, once, twice, thrice. At the fourth trial her right leg moved slightly. He bent down and, with his hands over the body, repeated the lifting motion. Nothing happened. The sweat of devotion dropped from his brow; his jaw hardened with determination as again and again he strove to bring life to his loved one's body; but there was no response to his magic.

He gazed around wildly at the circle of fear-stricken women. Then, with a choking sob, the witch-doctor dropped full length across the body of his sweetheart, and the women, shrieking loudly, ran back to the kraal.

SEVERAL days later the council decided that there should be no "smelling out" to determine who killed the girl, Nomyaka, as the witch-doctor had given some cattle to her father in token of his grief.

Upina, taking his son with him, left the king's kraal to go to his own.

As they passed under a certain tree the little chap squealed with delight for, hanging from one of the branches, was the body of a snake. Upina knocked the lifeless reptile to the ground with one of his sticks. Examining it closely he noticed that one of its fangs was missing.

Sighing sadly he picked up his son and swung him on to his shoulder saying—

"We will go on, my son, lest darkness overtake us."

And the little fellow sang with joy; his little heels played a drum-like tattoo on Upina's heart.

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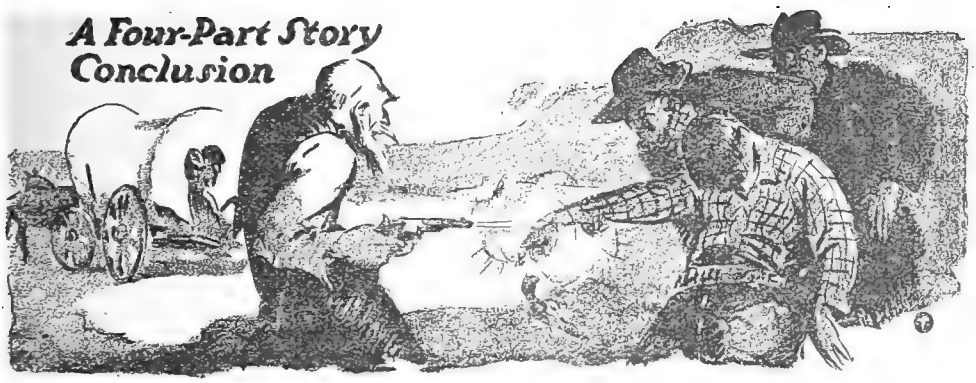


# Over the Rim of the Ridge

## by Hugh Pendexter

*Author of "Pay Gravel," "War Wampum," etc.*

***The first part of the story briefly retold in story form***

TO THE Territory of Nevada, during the silver rush of 1861, came gamblers of all sorts. At Roney's Place, while waiting for the Nevada-bound coach, Washoe, a square gambler, met two old acquaintances—"Sorry" Kane and "Feeble" Thomas. He interfered on their behalf when Bill Mayfield, a bad-man, bullied Feeble, causing him to drop rich specimens of silver ore.

The sight of the ore started the rumor that Kane and Thomas had "struck it rich," but the arrival of the coach prevented further developments.

One of the passangers of the coach was a girl, Matilda Jaimson, who later confided to Washoe that she was going to Carson City to meet her father.

At a wayside house where the passengers of the coach stopped for food, Mayfield endeavored to get the drop on Washoe, but Matilda showed she knew how to handle a rifle and forced the bully to back down.

Washoe, fearing for the girl's safety, drove her to Carson City and as her father had not yet arrived left her in charge of Miss Clapp at Sierra Seminary.

Hastening to the St. Nicholas bar, Washoe found that the rich strike made by Kane and Thomas was the chief topic of conversation.

"Kell" Hawkins, a crooked gambler, spoke slightingly of the girl and later, with the help of two friends, tried to swindle Washoe at cards.

Washoe pulled his derringer on them, and the three conspirators departed for Virginia City vowing to get even.

Kane and Thomas persuaded Washoe to accompany them to their hiding-place—a tunnel in the side of a hill—and there revealed the fact that they had not discovered a silver ledge.

"A man named Jaimson, a Tennessee cuss, gave me the ore," said Thomas. "He gave it to me so's I'd fetch a letter in and mail it."

The letter was addressed to Matilda, telling her not to come in until she heard from him.

The two old-timers then told Washoe of their search for an ancient city where gold could be had for the taking. They offered to take Washoe in as partner, but he was anxious to get to Virginia City and with the coming of darkness he set out.

"Gentle George" was at Virginia City when Washoe arrived. His business was, the bar-tender said, "Winding up folks that some one wants to git rid of."

"George," said Washoe, "just what is your game now? You might start in so we can see who's to mess up the floor. No sense in waiting."

Washoe thought George was in the pay of Kell Hawkins.

"Bless you," murmured the killer, "I'm not after you. If I were I'd have had you long before this."

Mystified, Washoe made for the Magnolia, but George entered first. Mayfield and the other three were at the bar, but they were unprepared. George, nettled at the homage paid another bad-man, insulted Mayfield, who, seeing Washoe grinning behind, concluded he was Gentle George's ally.

Washoe, though warned to go away by "Mexico," a woman whom he had once befriended, went in search of Hawkins and found him in the back room off the gambling-hall. He concluded to take the feud to the enemy but found to his dismay not only Hawkins, but a couple of toughs named Planter and Moses, as well as Mayfield and his three pals.

"If your friend is outside he might as well come in," said Hawkins.

Washoe realized that they were afraid of his supposed ally, Gentle George.

"I'm here on my own business. I'm playing a lone hand," he insisted.

They did not believe him and declared that they were anxious for his friendship. Not until he had gone did they realize he had spoken the truth. During the ensuing quarrel Planter was shot by Mayfield, and the gang planned to tell Planter's woman, "French Fannie," that Washoe had shot him.

Washoe learned from John Blackburn, a deputy sheriff, that Gentle George was after Sorry Kane.

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Blackburn also told Washoe of the murder of Planter and warned Washoe that the crime might be fastened upon him. Mexico later confirmed this and added that French Fannie would shoot him on sight.

Washoe, unable to face an angry woman, fled to Flowery Diggings.

Washoe gained a new enemy when he refused to tell Gentle George the whereabouts of Sorry Kane. The proprietor of a gambling-hall told George that Washoe knew all about Kane and Thomas, and also spoke of the girl Matilda Jaimson.

George called at the seminary, professing to be Washoe's friend, and was well received. Matilda told him that her father had struck it rich, and George was anxious to get a share. He enlisted Hawkins' aid and sent a fake telegram to the girl reading:

Come to Virginy and meet me at the Magnolia.
PAP.

Washoe received news that it was safe for him to return to Virginia City and was surprized to find Matilda singing at the Magnolia. She was well protected by Gentle George, who had evidently misrepresented Washoe to her. She plainly believed that Washoe had harmed French Fannie, who was after him for the killing of Planter.

Blackburn, on the trail of the Mayfield gang, whom he suspected of robbing the Wells-Fargo express, checked Washoe's anger at George. As a result the meeting of the two men resulted only in threats.

A shot at Blackburn as he emerged from Washoe's lodgings could not be proved on any one of Washoe's numerous enemies.

Washoe departed to warn Kane that George was after him, and to tell him that the tunnel hiding-place had been discovered.

MEANWHILE "Jayhawker," a member of Mayfield's gang, was boasting of his gold, and treating every one. He was killed by a shot through the window before he could tell where the gold came from. Blackburn, however, discovers that it was part of the bullion stolen from the express office.

Gentle George attempted to make Thomas tell where Kane was hidden by bullying him. The girl Matilda intervened and, getting the drop on George, made him desist. Washoe coming in at that moment was the next object of George's ill-humor. George reached for his gun but, before he could draw, someone shot at him. In the ensuing confusion Washoe and the unknown assailant escaped.

Thomas guided Washoe to Kane's hiding-place and Kane explained that he had been falsely accused by the Mormons of being an accomplice of the murder of Joe Smith—the Mormon leader. Kane was of the opinion that Gentle George had been hired by the Mormons to kill him.

On Washoe's return to Virginia City he was warned that not only desperadoes are after him but the forces of law and order. Seeking to get word to Matilda he discovered that she had not been seen since the affair at the Magnolia. George, too, had vanished. Greatly worried, Washoe bluffed Kell Hawkins into betraying George's whereabouts.

"You'd better ask George where the girl is," Hawkins sneered.

Washoe's apparent carelessness encouraged Hawkins to draw but Washoe beat him to it and Hawkins dropped with a bullet through his brain.

Just then French Fannie, half-mad with sorrow, entered the bar and shot at Washoe. But Mexico pushed him on one side and was herself killed.

Washoe made good his escape pursued by a disordered mob which shouted

"Hang the woman killer!"

Meanwhile Matilda, kidnaped by Gentle George, was taken to the gang's cabin. There she was to be kept until her father had paid ransom.

Before Gentle George departed with Mayfield to Virginia City he assured the girl that the three men left to guard her—Moses and two toughs—would not harm her.

"IT'S George," he smoothly stated. "I'm about to return to town. Young Washoe is in the hands of a Virginia mob—or was last night. He's probably dead by this time. He killed a Mexican girl——"

"What's the use of telling clumsy lies to me," she interrupted. "I heard the talk made by that old scarecrow Moses when he came last night. Stood on the box and listened at the window. Heard it all. Hawkins is the one Mister Washoe killed. Reckon he did right. Lucky you wasn't there for him to fall foul of."

"I'll soon be there for him to fall foul of, if he's alive and at liberty," promised George. "But I didn't come to talk about those things. I don't want you to be cooped up in there. If you'll promise not to try to wander below the bend, or beyond the three pine-nuts up the valley, and to return to your cabin before sundown you can spend your time out of doors. A man will always be stationed to turn you back if you get out of bounds. One man will always be in the men's cabin to watch which way you go. You can't get out on either side without being seen, as there's no cover. I'm telling you this so you won't get the idea you can escape if allowed to leave the cabin."

The girl was silent for several moments, and then replied—

"If there isn't a mighty good chance of getting away I won't try."

"Good. The guards are instructed to keep away from you so long as you don't try to run for it. It's more than ten miles to the first hut and you couldn't possibly make it. The men will treat you decently if you keep your promise. If you try any game I'm afraid they'll be rough."

"How long you going to keep me here?"

"Not long. Just long enough to make a trade with your father."

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He heard her laughing. His sandy brows contracted.

"Strikes you as being funny," he said.

"I'd give all I've toted away from the Magnolia if I could see how you look when you finish offering to trade with pap," she replied.

She had no fear. She had never been hurt in her life. She had seen much of George, Hawkins and Planter at the Magnolia. She had, from the start, held the last two in contempt. She was terribly enraged at George, but she could never picture him as being ferocious.

George was in an evil humor when he returned to his horse and informed Ben and Kirk that the girl had passed her word and that they were not to intrude on her privacy so long as she showed no disposition to climb out of the valley. As he and Mayfield took to the rough smear of a road the girl's face appeared at the small window, and in mock dismay she was calling out:

"No 'stove-pipe' hat this morning? Why, how can you be dressed up without it? What will the world think?"

Mayfield grinned, and George swore softly. Courage occupied first place in his make-up. Next came vanity. He had gone far out of his way to wrest laurels from other killers because vanity was ever urging him to stand at the head of his calling. For a man so deadly he was very thin-skinned. For one to laugh at him was, in his estimation, a more heinous offense than to attack him with a deadly weapon.

"You can laugh, Mayfield," he murmured. "There's no law against it while we're out here. But that young brat will laugh out the other side of her mouth if she keeps this up too long."

"Reckon ye're human, like the rest of us," leered Mayfield.

George pulled his soft hat forward and rode on in silence.

When some five miles from Dayton, Mayfield proved he was astute in an animal sort of way by urging that they follow up the east bank of the Carson until well above Dayton before crossing the river. Then, if they were observed, it would be believed they were returning from Carson City. George approved of the suggestion; and instead of avoiding Dayton and cutting into the stage road between it and Silver City, with the always possible risk of being seen and the nature of their journey into the unsettled country being commented upon, they openly approached the town from the southwest. This route would also permit Mayfield to reach a bar before coming to Silver City. George frowned at his companion's insistence to get a drink, but Mayfield refused to be disciplined beyond a certain point.

"Keep yer hat down an' wait for me out back this first bar. No one will notice ye. I never drunk much here an' this shanty is a place I never was in. I'll keep my trap shet, an' no one will know me. Just one mild snort an' we'll be ridin' on ag'in," said the ruffian.

"Be as quick as you can. We ought not to stop here. You'll find me out back. Don't make any talk to any one. Don't get into any rows."

Mayfield rushed thirstily into the barroom. George took the two horses to the rear of the building, where he would be shielded from any one in the road. He allowed the horses to graze on the short grass while he took his ease on a log that ultimately would float down the river and be used in timbering a mine. He had barely seated himself, however, when some two score men and a dozen yapping dogs came around the corner of the saloon. The killer's hand instinctively fell on a gun, but a second glance assured him the noisy group were entirely taken up with their own affairs. The absence of the tall hat allowed him to avoid ready recognition. He relaxed, slouched his hat lower, and watched the noisy crowd idly. One man was bringing a large box and the dogs were leaping up at this and yelping and growling madly. The gathering separated to both sides of the open space, and the man with the box dropped it on the ground, straightened up, mopped his brow and loudly announced:

"In this box is the king of all badgers. I oughter know as I give ten dollars to a Digger Injun for him——"

"Git out, you old fraud! You beat that Injun down to a small drink of mighty poor whisky," jeered a spectator.

Without taking an offense the first speaker continued:

"Now, gents, you know how I admire that badger's gamey p'ints. An' I stand ready to back him ag'in ary dawg in this town for ten dollars a fight."

"If you can scrape together ten dollars it'll be the first time since you struck the

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valley," taunted a spectator. "But if you can beg, or borrer, that much money you plank it down on that box and I'll cover it long enough for old Tige to chaw that danged badger to pieces."

The promotor began searching his ragged clothing, and only by the most careful investigation managed to get the stake together. The crowd hooted him good-naturedly. The other party to the wager also required a bit of time to secure the required sum, but at last advanced, brandishing it in his hand. The promotor dumped a badger from the box, and the wager was posted. The owner of old Tige dived into a circle of quarreling canines and secured his pet by the neck. Tige was a stiff-haired cur that snarled and snapped even at his master. He ceased these endeavors only after he had been pointed at the badger and told to "go git him."

The badger flattened himself on the ground. The odds were against him and the battle-environment was new, but he made no attempt to escape. He hugged the ground and waited to be attacked. Tige was all noise and boasting. The badger was silent, calculating and deadly. George leaned forward, interested before he realized it; and his sympathy was with the trapped wild thing. Somehow the creature's plight suggested to him what his own last fight might be, should he be fated to make, as Mayfield had expressed it, a "fightin' finish."

The dog ran in, excited by the chorus of encouragement and eager to do himself proud. The badger remained as if dead until the brute's jaws were about to close on him. Then, quicker than eye could follow, quicker than George could draw a gun, he had the dog by the under jaw. The dog howled and threshed about, and soon the powdery dust had concealed them from view. The spectators yelled and gesticulated, all partisans for the dog, until from the obscuring cloud leaped the dog, still howling in a piercing key, his tail between his legs. He was aided in his frantic flight by a kick from his owner and the derisive hoots of the spectators.

George smiled grimly. So would they find him in that last fight, turning his assailants back. The promoter, boisterous with joy, pointed to the twenty dollars on the box and challenged:

"I'm betting that on this fighting badger ag'in any dawg any one wants to produce. Who's the man who hankers to take my twenty dollars away with him?"

"I'll take ye," quickly accepted an onlooker. And he entered the cleared space with a dog several pounds heavier than the one just defeated.

"That ain't no dawg. It's a wolf," protested the promoter.

The spectators upbraided him angrily and demanded to know if he were backing down. With a forced smile he pointed to the box and surrendered:

"I had a dawg in mind when I said ary a dawg in this valley. But cover the money, neighbor, and we'll see what happens."

"He's only a little bit wolf," said the man, with a broad grin and a wink at the crowd.

He deposited his money and the dog was released and flew like a bolt until within a foot of the motionless badger, when he came to a plunging halt. Next he began to show hesitancy—(to the chagrin of his owner.) He slowly circled the badger, and sniffed and wrinkled his nose and displayed all his powerful teeth. The promoter laughed exultingly. The owner yelled out for his animal to make quick work of it and exhorted him to "dig him out." The mongrel halted before the badger and took another look at the steady, implacable eyes. He turned tail and would have retreated had not his master, with many oaths and a few kicks, aroused his martial ardor. He growled loudly to bolster up his own courage. How many times had George seen alleged "bad" men try the same tricks! The yells of the spectators told him what was expected of him as they closed in behind him and fenced him in with the inanimate form. In reckless despair he made a plunge. This time the spectators did not enjoy even a pretense of a fight. The dog started for the enemy, but his false courage oozed before he came in contact with the crouching captive. The dog swerved one side and repeated his maneuver of circling his opponent, all the while striving to make the men believe that it would be but a few moments before he found an opening. But whenever he endeavored to catch the badger off his guard there he was confronted with the venomous determined eye. Just as the dog was deciding the badger had half a dozen heads, the badger took the initiative and had his teeth through an ear. With a wild howl of terror the poor brute tore himself loose and ran

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between the legs of the men and far down the river-bank.

"They'll have to come better than that if they ever get me," muttered George. "Men are like that. Mayfield's talk meant men who guzzle rot-gut and then get killed while half-drunk."

By this time the promoter firmly believed he had a better investment than any mine on the Comstock offered, and he was expansively proclaiming:

"There 'she lays, gen'l'men, forty simon pure dollars. Forty dollars for ary a galoot what can fetch ary dawg on four legs that can do for my fighting badger. Forty dollars. They she lays! Who wants that forty?"

"Here comes Combs with his bull!" excitedly yelled a spectator. "Hi! Combs! Forty dollars waiting for you."

Mr. Combs, a tall and rangy man, with a big white bulldog trotting close to his heels, approached and gravely listened to explanations, requests, and profane encouragement. He finally demanded—

"Has that forty dollars been counted?"

"It's all there," gruffly assured the promoter, eying the business-like bearing of the big bulldog with much doubt stirring in his bosom. "You can cover any part of it. Boys have been going as high as ten dollars."

This attempt to save some of his winnings was vigorously hooted down and he was informed he must stick to his original offer, or take hard faring. The owner of the bulldog produced some money, was irritated to discover he had left the bulk of his funds at home, and was induced to accept various small loans until the stake was completed. Then he announced that his pink-eyed pet was ready for the fray.

Shown the foe, the bulldog advanced. Unlike his predecessors he neither barked, nor growled. Nor did he rush in frantically. He was as calm and deliberate as a machine; and George's mouth drew down as he wondered if somewhere in the world was a man of the bull-dog breed who was on his way to meet him. It was all in the day's work for the bulldog. He had never yet met a dog he could not close his teeth on; and once having set his jaws he could remember no victim that ever escaped. With superb confidence he advanced steadily, perfectly willing to swap bites if he could but seize his opponent. Perhaps it rather puzzled him to find an enemy so quiescent, although smaller and weaker dogs often threw themselves on their backs and held up their paws in rank submission.

He had never fought with a badger, however, and he sadly underrated the lightning quickness of the animal. Just as he was comfortably preparing to close his punishing jaws he was amazed and chagrined to find sharp teeth catching him by the underjaw. But the bull was game and made no outcry. The grip interfered with his breathing, but was merely one of those disagreeable incidents any fighting dog may encounter. He exerted all his powers to overcome the enemy's initial advantage. The dust covered them and filled their throats. Over and over they rolled, a fight to the death apparently. The badger's death, if low-voiced side-bets offered by the spectators, and finding no takers, indicated anything. But the badger maintained his grip as if grown to the bull; the latter's jaws were chewing the empty air. George smiled triumphantly. Thus would his most skilled adversary fare when they came to death grips.

Someone warned that the combatants would be choked to death by the dust. Another yelled for them to be pulled part and given water. The owner of the bull angrily insisted the fight should go on, as his pet was about to place the badger beyond the want of water. But when a white leg showed through the dust in a feeble kick he rushed in and dragged the almost inanimate warrior free. The dog was panting for breath, his mouth filled with dust and hair. The badger, somewhat torn, but still in the ring and ready for trouble, settled himself again and cast about his wicked glance for the next victim.

The owner of the bull sullenly announced the fight was over so far as his dog was concerned and carried the vanquished one away in his arms. The promoter pocketed his earnings, and repeated his defiance to all dogs in the territory.

"If the bull can't chaw him up, no dawg can," sorrowfully admitted one of the men.

The promoter surveyed the badger and decided his fighting powers had not been impaired. He challenged—

"I'll bet twenty dollars against forty that the badger can't be licked by all the dawgs here."

This offer was promptly accepted and some seven or eight dogs were rounded up and *sic'd* onto the wary, waiting one. But



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neither eight, nor twenty dogs could, or would, fight as a unit. While one poor brute was being terribly punished by the sharp teeth the others were yelping and snarling and dancing around. Dog after dog in turn took punishment, and thereafter kept on the outskirts of the circle. The badger took them in turn, never once shifting his plan of defense. At the end of fifteen minutes there was scarcely a dog unwounded. The badger also showed some fresh hurts, but none of a critical nature. The dogs drew back and began to slink away. The badger flattened himself on the ground and waited. The losers stared at each other mournfully. The promoter roared in great glee.

"It ain't a fair fight," remonstrated a miner. "The critter lays so flat a dog can't git no purchase on him. Let's even it up by tying his hind-legs."

"Go ahead and tie 'em, but I ain't risking any more of my money."

"Somebody fetch a piece of rope. I'll fix that critter so he won't have all the 'vantage," bawled the miner.

FROM outside the circle a cold voice broke in—

"You've hounded that poor devil enough."

They turned toward George and stared at him in astonishment. While they gazed his revolver cracked, and the badger was released from all necessity of catering further to the valley's desire for amusement.

"Well, I'll be ——" gasped the owner of the wolf-dog.

"What you mean by murdering my fighting badger?" spluttered the promoter.

Angry at himself for having intruded on the scene and thereby inviting recognition George turned on his heel and started to walk back to the two horses. He had not intended to interfere with the brutal "sport." But the last proposal, to tie the badger's legs, added to his abiding consciousness that the undaunted creature's fighting spirit was akin to his own, had caused him to act on impulse. Now his only desire was to erase himself from the situation. But before he had reached the horses a hand clapped down on his shoulder and whirled him violently about. But as he spun about the muzzle of his Colt caught the owner of the wolf-dog under the chin and remained there.

"You were wanting to speak to me, stranger?" muttered George, the lust to kill surging through his brain.

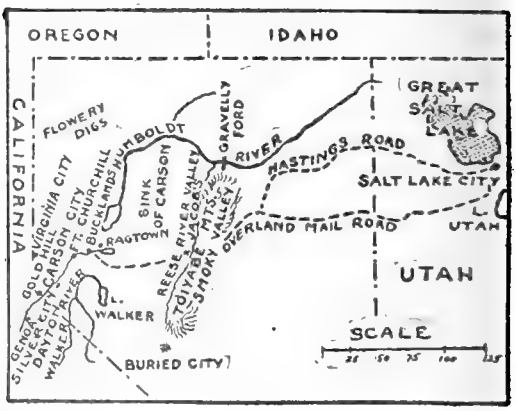
The promoter glanced under the brim of the soft hat and frantically howled:

"Back up! It's George. I seen him plug young Mulligan at Carson!"

The man was not a coward, but as he heard the name and read his fate in the dull eyes he began to tremble. He made no move to back away from the pressure on his throat.

"I ain't got nothin' to say to you, mister," he huskily mumbled. "I didn't know who you was."

"It's Gentle George!" repeated the promoter in an awed voice. "And I didn't know him without his 'tall-slick.' Mister George, none of the boys has any bone to pick with you. We're just been having a




little innocent enjoyment. I had quite a lot of money 'vested in that badger. I'd reckoned on fighting him from here to Virginy. Now he's dead. But if he had to peg out we're all mighty proud it was your gun that done for him. We'll bury him with honors and the drinks is on me. I ain't no slouch. I win money and spend it. That's my natur'. Being free-handed has kept me poorer'n a gopher. Let's all emigrant to the bar."

George saw Mayfield running from the saloon, and his reason returned. His wrath suddenly was deflected toward the desperado. Mayfield was the cause of the disagreeable situation. Before midday, word would be carried in both directions along the stage-road about Gentle George's theatrical appearance at the groggery. He lowered his gun and walked to his horse

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and mounted. Mayfield, willing to do battle, approached the crowd of men with a belligerent swagger, his hands on his hips, his small blood-shot eyes seeking a victim.

The promoter whispered his name, although this was not necessary as Mayfield was a well-known character and needed no introduction. George rode up, leading the ruffian's horse, and leaned down and tapped him on the shoulder and motioned for him to mount. For a moment Mayfield glared back defiantly; then his whisky courage weakened and with a volley of foul epithets directed at the silent group he climbed into the saddle. As the two men took to the road Mayfield complained—

"We oughter jumped into them."

"We're lucky if we haven't already jumped in so far that the rope begins to tighten," gritted George. "You had to have your cursed drinks, and the result is a row that fixes on us the attention of twenty men. There's not one of them who'll fail to remember that at this hour, on this particular morning, I was here in Dayton wearing a soft hat."

"What of it?" grumbled Mayfield. "How'd I know you was goin' to make yerself known to all creation? When I seen from the winder how ye was havin' a good time, watchin' the fight, I took my time an' didn't hold myself to one drink. But ye've got a right to come an' go an' wear what ye want to. Ye don't know nothin' 'bout the gal's droppin' from sight. She wouldn't let ye walk home with her. Ye never seen her after she quit the Magnolia. Ye've been up the valley huntin' for Sorry Kane. No one can prove anything ag'in ye."

"Perhaps not," slowly admitted George. "But I'd give a thousand dollars if that badger had died in the hills. Sooner or later we'll be asked to explain why we were at Dayton this morning. If I say I was hunting for Kane I'll be asked to tell why I wanted to find him. We must shift our plans at once and get the girl out of that valley. The trade with her old man must be put through quick. We'll take her out to the Reese River valley. It may be we'll have to lead the old man to where we have her hidden to convince him she's in our hands. Yes; that's the best move."

"A mighty good idee," agreed Mayfield. "But don't forgit that Virginy is now all took up over Washoe. Moses is sure the street mob caught him. We'll say he stole the gal. Don't mention Kane. We'll say we was huntin' for him to find the gal; that his talk at the Magnolia was all a bluff to make folks suspect us. The crowd will remember how she turned him down that night he tried to talk with her. No one knows when we quit town. We'll say we was on the street when word was passed that the gal was missing."

George's pale eyes flickered with admiration.

"Mayfield," he frankly admitted, "I'm beginning to think you have more brains for this kind of work than Hawkins had. We were on the street when Washoe ran for it. We heard men shouting that he had killed one woman and had stolen another. There'll be dozens who will honestly swear they heard people say the Jaimson girl was missing. We got horses and rode down the Carson City road without stopping to learn if Washoe was ahead of us, or had been captured. We supposed he had gotten away. We've been on a still hunt, but found nothing. We'll turn suspicion against him if he's still alive."

Somewhat flustered by this unexpected praise Mayfield grinned broadly. Then he inquired:

"But what if he ain't been caught. Or what if he's been caught an' turned loose?"

"Then I'll shoot him on sight," was the prompt reply. "I can kill him now and no one will make much of a fuss. He killed Hawkins. I'll say he stole the girl away and some will believe it. I'll stay in Virginia just long enough to get word about old Kane. You're confident your men can find him?"

"Bint an' Gerry are my two smartest men. They can find a weasel. Didn't they give Hawkins word about the old tunnel? If he'd acted quick, without waiting to talk with ye, he'd 'a' found the two old rats at home. Inside a day or two one of the boys will be back ready to lead ye to where t'other one is keepin' watch over Kane. But if ye'd left it to the boys to finish him off ye'd 'a' saved time an' bother."

"I can take no one's word for it. I must be sure. I'm going back to Salt Lake City and I don't want any surprizes sprung on me. When I report that Kane is dead I want to know he *is* dead, and not likely to pop up somewhere. People I'm working for are very particular."

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## CHAPTER X

### MOSES TELLS FORTUNES

HALF an hour after Mayfield and George clattered away down the valley the man called Ben mounted his horse and rode after them, yet taking care not to overtake them. Kirk carried the girl's breakfast to the cabin door. She came out and ate it in the sunshine. Kirk was slow to retire and stared at her much. She affected not to notice him. Moses called from the other cabin for his companion to join him. Kirk sullenly obeyed; and when he entered the cabin the girl glided to the end of the structure and rested her head against the unchinked logs. She was in time to hear Moses say:

"You heard what George said. You keep clear of her."

"George ain't my boss, and I ain't taking no orders from you."

"You tell George that when he gets back and you'll take orders from no living man again," ominously warned the gambler.

The desperado fumed and blustered, but he was not sincere in his defiance. Running out of oaths he sat down on the edge of a bunk and stared gloomily at his rough boots. Moses remarked—

"Ben's gone after whisky, I take it."

"What's that to you if he has? This is a free country."

"A very foolish Benjamin," murmured Moses. "Perhaps he's forgotten what George said about no drinking here."

"To —— with George!" passionately cried Kirk. "It's George this, and George that, till I'm sick of it." He stole a glance at Moses' imperturbable face and after a bit of silence explained—

"We don't call it drinking till we get so we don't know what we're doing."

With a soft slap-slap Moses shuffled and cut a deck of cards and began dealing a game of solitaire on the top of a box. Kirk watched him idly for a minute, then lifting his head displayed a mild interest. Finally he remarked—

"I've seen fellers that can tell fortunes with cards."

"I can tell your fortune," curtly responded Moses without glancing up.

"Huh? Sho! Well, what do you see?" And he leaned forward by resting his elbows on his knees.

Moses ran off four cards and muttered—

"Here is this cabin, the ten-spot."

He ran off three cards, and frowned at the layout, his long nose going down and his lip crawling up.

"What do you see now?" asked Kirk, striving to treat it as a joke.

"I see an open grave," the gambler slowly replied. "Beside it is a dead man. Dead man, I should say, was either drunk or crazy."

"That's a —— of a fortune!" shrilly cried Kirk. "Whose fortune you telling anyway? See me dead beside a grave, huh?" And he sat erect and glared at the cards.

"That's queer," mumbled Moses, rubbing his long nose. "You don't come in diamonds. The dead man must be Ben."

Kirk relaxed in relief, but argued—

"Things don't have to be the way the cards say."

"No, cards tell what'll happen if a man don't shift his bets."

"You're telling Ben's fortune, not mine."

"I haven't finished. Let's see where you come up."

The gambler ran off four cards and gave a nervous start as the last one fell on the table. He lifted his expressionless eyes and glanced at Kirk, then frowned at the new combination.

"Ain't my cards show'd up yet?" anxiously asked Kirk.

"Yes. You're here. That club. And next to you is death."

Kirk laughed uneasily although he endeavored to conceal his superstitious fear.

"Trying to scare me. Bah! A child wouldn't be fooled by such stuff. Tell your own fortune. Prob'ly nothing but diamonds and han'some women, huh?"

Moses swept up the cards and shuffled them.

"I come in hearts," he murmured as he dealt off four. Little beads of perspiration dampened his forehead as he glanced down at the story unfolding before him. As he failed to speak Kirk demanded—

"Well? Ain't that the death sign again?"

Moses nodded.

"And you come next to it, don't you?" Again the gambler nodded.

"That shows the cards lie!" insisted Kirk. "The three of us dead? Not by a —— sight. Tell the girl's fortune, George's fortune, Bill's."

Moses shook his head and shuffled the cards and resumed his solitaire.

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"It's bad luck to tell the fortune of a person not looking on," he explained.

"But you killed old Ben off when he wa'n't looking on!" protested Kirk.

"He turned up in your fortune. Your deaths are linked together. You two will die about the same time."

Kirk laughed derisively and taunted:

"It won't work. You can't fool this chicken. You card men believe more stuff than Injuns do."

He walked to the door and stepped out into the sunshine. The girl was standing in the doorway of her cabin. He called out to her:

"You can leave the dishes there. I'll come and fetch 'em by'n by." With that he took to the road and walked down to the bend and disappeared among the loose boulders.

After he had passed from sight Miss Matilda gathered up the dishes and carried them into the men's cabin. Moses, intent on testing his fortune again, hurriedly swept up the cards, thinking it was Kirk. On beholding her he bowed his head and dealt the cards. She passed behind him, deposited the dishes, snatched up a butcher knife and slipped it under her little jacket and sidled to the door.

Without looking at her Moses growled—

"Better not walk far from your cabin."

"Mister George said I had the run of the valley between the bend and the three pines."

"So you have. But better keep close to your cabin. Ben's rode to town."

"To get whisky," she completed, her gray eyes clouding with fear.

"How'd you know that?" And for a moment the hand holding a card was suspended over the box.

"I saw him ride away this morning. George broke the only jug last night before you came. It's the whisky you're thinking about, ain't it?"

"I'm not talking. I just say stick close to your cabin. Needn't stay indoors 'less a storm blows up. But don't wander. I can't run 'round like a youngster. Stay where I can keep an eye on you."

"And on them," she added, the hostility of her gaze lessening a bit.

At least this man was warning her for her own good. The fact he was actuated by fear of George did not diminish the value of his warning. She looked at his impassive, predatory visage in silence for a minute, then suddenly asked—

"Ain't you ashamed to be mixed up in this?"

"Not mixed up in your troubles any," he promptly denied. "Ran away from that young —— hound of a Washoe. Didn't know you was here till I got here."

She did not tell him he lied, that he knew of George's plans in advance and had acted as messenger in place of Hawkins. But she did suggest:

"Mister Washoe may come here. He's that roving kind."

He affected not to hear. She continued:

"Mister George will be mortal mad if the men drink and forget his orders. He'd probably blame you."

The thin lips pressed together more tightly. She urged:

"It would be money in your pocket if you took me out of this before the man gets back with the whisky. The other man is below the turn in the road. Gone to meet the jug, most likely. You could start with me up the valley and swing around and hit some town."

He raised his vulture-face and grinned sardonically.

"No, thanks. Not any for me. It's enough to have young Washoe after me without adding Gentle George and Bill Mayfield to the chase."

She was not much disappointed by his refusal. She had seen him often about the Magnolia and had heard much about him. She sat down just outside the door and requested:

"Tell me something about what happened in Virginia last night. I was at the window and heard what you told the men in the road last night."

"You heard enough," he muttered with a drawing-down of his thin lips.

"You knew all the time that Mayfield killed the man Planter." He jerked up his head and stared at her venomously. "You think Mister George is a bad man to cross," she boldly continued. "That's 'cause you never met Pap Jaimson. He can kill a bear with his naked hands."

This boast did not seem to make any impression. She studied his downcast visage thoughtfully, then tried—

"How was that other woman killed at the Magnolia?"

"Trying to save young Washoe's life," he snapped out.

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She knew he was telling the truth. She rose, her small face developing lines of weariness. The woman must have had a strong incentive when she was willing to give her life to save Washoe's.

"She was a true friend," she muttered, talking more to herself than to the gambler. "No matter what else she was, she was a true friend."

She had turned to walk away when he scooped up the cards, and while shuffling them, remarked—

"About that butcher-knife you picked up in this room."

She wheeled and instinctively thrust a hand under her jacket and stared at him defiantly. He quietly contined:

"It's all right. If Ben hadn't gone for whisky I couldn't allow it. But as the game runs, it's all right. Don't fall down on it and cut yourself. Stick near these cabins and you won't need it."

"Meaning you won't let them bother me?"

"Meaning I'm remembering George's orders."

"I'm walking up the valley a bit. I sha'n't go beyond the pine trees."

He did not answer, but returned to his game. As she proceeded toward the pines she frequently glanced backward, but failed to glimpse either of the two men. Once arrived at the stunted pines she ripped a strip of silver braid from her jacket and looped it over her shoulder, bandolier-fashion, and through a fixed noose passed the knife. Putting on her jacket the knife was concealed under her left arm. Feeling better for possessing the ugly weapon she took time to survey the surrounding country.

THE valley was barren except for the occasional clumps of greasewood and sage-brush, the combination of green and gray giving a bronze effect. The low parallel ridges were weathered to the rock and looked brown and smooth like dead men's bones. Beyond the pines the valley rose more rapidly and lost itself in formations even more broken and eroded. Her eyes glistened as she realized the excellent hiding places the lonely, desolate country offered. Then her head sank as the hopelessness of escape in that direction became apparent. Even if she found an opportunity to procure a stock of food there would remain the problem of water.

There remained the possibility of flight to the Carson River. But did she take that direction she must have night to help her. She slowly returned toward the cabins, walking over mineral lands which, two years ahead, were to fill the valley with transient mining activities. She had no intention of submitting to captivity and waiting to be ransomed or rescued. She suffered keenly, also, in constantly remembering how she had misjudged Washoe. She was all the more impatient to escape and to avoid being beholden to him; for she firmly believed he would endeavor to come to her aid. That other woman, the one who had given her life to save his, bothered her much. Yet it was natural for her to be just, and she was forced to admit the splendor of the woman's sacrifice.

Wrenching her thoughts from this disturbing theme she became acutely objective as she neared her cabin. The distance to the Carson could be covered without food or water. She even decided she would be less likely to be recaptured if she went afoot. But she must wait until dark, and that meant the additional problem of escaping from her cabin. The window was impossible. There remained the foundation logs and the door. With the knife, if Moses did not reveal her possession of it, she might be able to dig under the logs. She quickened her step, impatient to examine the interior of her jail more carefully.

Moses was still at his solitaire as she passed his door. He heard her step and his eyes glanced up, then he was back to the interminable shuffling and dealing of the cards. There was no sign of Kirk. She was correct in assuming he was still below the bend, impatiently waiting for his friend to return with the jug. But only the man himself knew how his thirst was waging a mighty war against superstitious fears roused by the prophecy of the cards.

Miss Matilda entered the cabin and tested the hard earthen floor close to the logs. A few minutes' work with the knife convinced her that tunneling was not the way to escape from the four walls. She transferred her attention to the door and examined the cleats supporting the bar. These were secured with nails and it would be impossible to loosen them with the knife. Two possible lines of action remained; she might be able to cut the cleats all but through before being locked up for the

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night, thus rendering the bar useless as a fastening once she exerted her strength against the door; or the two guards might become hopelessly intoxicated by nightfall and be tricked into opening her door and affording her an opportunity to run into the darkness. She had no fear that Moses could overtake her.

Kirk returned from the bend and made no effort to conceal his evil humor. The failure of his companion to arrive with the jug caused him to forget his fear of the dead men and the open graves. Had there been whisky in the cabin when Moses made his dire revelations the fellow probably would have been slow to partake of it. But his playing with temptation and his disappointment at his partner's continued absence whetted his appetite to an abnormal edge. He was tantalized by visions of a Dayton bar. He could picture his companion taking his ease in some saloon. His throat ached as he contrasted Ben's good time with the loneliness of the valley. He felt murderous toward George, and, in a lesser degree, toward Moses. Mayfield was his boss, to a certain extent. Mayfield did not presume to dictate to his followers except when engaged in an important stroke of business. Between campaigns and killings each member of the gang was his own master. And never was whisky proscribed. Mayfield would be the first to resent such a suggestion. Jayhawker was an exception because of a queer mental kink that impelled him to betray secrets when sufficiently drunk.

"What about food?" asked Moses after Kirk had remained sulking in a bunk beyond the midday hour.

"Didn't know I was to do any squaw work for you," growled Kirk.

"What about the girl?" murmured the gambler, gathering up the cards and thrusting them into his pocket to cover up his securing and palming a derringer.

"If she ain't old enough to cook her own grub she can go hungry."

"Then take some wood to her door and leave it on the outside. I'll carry her some bacon and a skillet. There's some bread in one of those bags."

"I ain't interested in any bread," declared Kirk.

But, being sober, he did not dare go too far. He gathered up some light wood and carried it to where the girl was standing in the doorway. He threw it down at her feet and leered at her villainously. He discovered he owed her a score for stopping his whisky. She watched him calmly as one might look at a curious animal. With a shrug of his shoulders and a twisted grin he turned back. Moses came almost immediately with a loaf of bread, a piece of bacon and a frying-pan. Placing them beside the girl he explained:

"Our cook refuses to work. Perhaps you can shift for yourself. You have a knife for cutting the bacon. I'll see what else they brought along for supplies."

"This will do," she told him. "I prefer to do my own cooking. Bring another plate and I'll cook some for you."

He brought two plates, one containing live coals, and, with her permission, entered the cabin and soon had a brisk fire burning. Then he retired, saying—

"When it's ready you can set it outside your door."

Her experience in preparing food under all sorts of conditions made the task a simple one. The bread she toasted over the coals. Heaping his plate she placed it outside the door and whistled shrilly. Kirk leaped from the cabin, his eyes glaring expectantly. Miss Matilda smiled at his appearance and knew he had hoped to behold his partner with the whisky jug. He scowled at her murderously; nor was his temper improved when he saw Moses sedately approach and retreat with the plate of food. Muttering foully he darted into the cabin and quickly emerged with a plate in his hand. Striding toward her he demanded—

"Where's mine?"

She eyed him contemptuously and replied: "This isn't the cook-house. You've made a mistake. I haven't any idea where yours is."

"Meaning you're playing fav'rites," he hissed.

"Meaning it's time for you to get out and leave me alone to eat my dinner," she retorted, still holding the doorway and pressing her left arm against the long knife under her jacket.

"You slapped my face last night," he muttered. "You're going to pay for that. Just keep that in your mind. It may be some time, and it may be mighty soon; but you'll pay."

"Time you get through paying for helping keep me here you won't be going round collecting any debts," she calmly told him.

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He took a step forward, the devil in him gaining mastery over prudence. The curt voice of Moses cut in:

"You, Kirk! Come back here!"

Kirk's hand went to his hip as he spun about. Moses was standing clear of his cabin door with a thirty-six held down at his side. Kirk recognized the weapon as being one of Mayfield's extra guns.

The gambler's pose was a challenge.

"You — you —" he ferociously spluttered; and his fingers closed around the handle of his own gun.

Moses fired, shooting from the hip; and Kirk gave a howl of pain as the tin plate was wrested from his grasp with a hole through the center.

"Come back here and cook your own dinner, Kirk," advised the gambler. "That open grave is mighty close to you. It won't be the plate next time."

Shaking his benumbed hand and cursing violently, Kirk walked to the second cabin. Moses stood one side and warily followed him within, and announced:

"It's too much work to bother with you. You say now if you'll behave yourself and remember orders, or be killed in your tracks. If you try any funny business when I'm not looking and I don't get you, George will."

Kirk sullenly kneeled by the fireplace and prepared a skillet of bacon and dumped in some beans. Moses hovered over him for a minute, undecided. Kirk felt his baleful gaze and was much disturbed.

"I ain't bringing you any fight," he muttered. "Take them —— fish eyes off'n me."

Satisfied the fellow would make no hostile demonstrations the gambler resumed eating, after shifting his seat so as to have his back to the wall. Moses was far from being satisfied with the situation. He was no gun-fighter, although he could be as merciless as a rattlesnake when cornered. It was his nature to avoid quarrels, the same always being without profit. The prospect of keeping an eye on Kirk, while expecting the fellow's partner to return at any minute with whisky, was not alluring.

The two men ate in silence. Finally Kirk arose, and without glancing toward the gambler, left the cabin. Moses glided after him as far as the door. Kirk was staring at the closed door of the girl's cabin. She had no way of fastening it on the inside. He was remembering how defenseless she was when he heard a voice roaring out a fragment of a camp-song below the bend. Then his head jerked about, and a wild light shone in his eyes. With a whoop of delight he ran down the road and met Ben. The latter was rollicking drunk and waving a jug.

"DON'T bust it, Benny!" begged Kirk, all his anger toward the man vanishing. "I'm dryer'n a horned toad."

He forthwith forgot all prophecies, uncorked the jug and allowed a large quantity of the fiery liquor to gurgle down his throat.

"But you did take your time!" he gasped as he replaced the stopper.

"Kirk, you know I ain't no yaller dawg to be told where to stay," boasted Ben. "I went to Dayton like a free man. I ain't nobody's nigger. Say, the whole town's talking about how George busted up a mighty good badger-dog fight there this morning."

Moses, who had followed Kirk down the road, caught some of the last and inquired:

"What's that? George stopped a fight? Did they know him?"

Ben guffawed loudly.

"Did they know him, old hoss? Could he 'a' busted up a fight—one man ag'in twenty—if they didn't know him, old hooked-nose?"

"That's bad! That's bad!" mumbled Moses, turning back and slowly shaking his head.

Kirk laid a hand on Ben's arm and motioned for him to wait until Moses got beyond hearing. Then in a low tone he related all that happened during Ben's absence, and the latter profanely promised:

"She'll cook grub for me, and don't you forget it! What's old hook-nose got to say about it? Is he better'n we be? And you say she cooked for him. Here! Let's have a drink. Then you trail along and watch your uncle."

They took another pull at the jug and walked on to the girl's cabin. There Ben dismounted and loudly announced:

"I'm mighty hungry. I'm honing for bacon and beans."

He winked at Kirk, who advised:

"Better see the new cook. Master hand at fixing bacon."

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Moses was watching them from the doorway of the second cabin. He was much worried over the situation, but his poker-face revealed nothing of his thoughts. The two tarried before the closed door, and Ben raucously inquired—

"Could you tell me if the new cook's to home?"

"She stays to home mighty close," said Kirk, moving back a step or two and watching Moses from the corner of his eye.

"Then I'll drop in and give my order," said Ben. And swinging the door open he stood in the doorway and bawled. "Stir your pegs and hustle some grub. I'm tired and hungry."

Miss Matilda, standing at the end of the cabin, one hand inside her jacket, watched him closely and made no reply. She was fighting against a horrible fear; such a fear as she had never experienced before. Ben, although half-drunk, knew she was afraid, and his bearing became more vicious.

"Come here, you doll-face," he huskily ordered. "Or do you hanker for me to come and fetch you? I'm rougher'n a bear when I'm kept waiting."

The girl did not move. She dared not trust herself to speak for fear her voice would betray her terror. The very fact she was afraid added to her fright. With a sudden burst of ferocity Ben cried:

"All right. You've had your chance. Now I'll fetch you."

He stepped inside and swung the door nearly to behind him. The girl's hand whipped out from under her jacket. Ben dodged instinctively and fell against the door; and at the same moment the butcher-knife stood quivering in the wood a foot above his head. The door swung open as the knife lodged in it, and the desperado rolled on the ground. Moses and Kirk for a moment beheld the knife in the door, then the girl was across the room and recovering it. As she pulled the knife free the door closed.

"Did you see that?" yelled Kirk. "She's armed! Got a knife! The young wild-cat!"

His amusement at the spectacle of his friend rolling on the ground died completely before the enormity of the prisoner's offense in possessing a weapon.

"Seems to know how to use it, too," said Moses. "If Ben hadn't taken a tumble all the whisky would be leaking out of him by this time."

Ben staggered to his feet and stared in bewilderment at the cabin and howled—

"Who tripped me?" And his hand flew to his gun.

Moses sharply interposed:

"None of that! You're drunk. You fell down. The fall saved your life. Come away! This is no place for you."

"Drunk, be I?" Ben roared, turning on the gambler. "You can boss Kirk round, but you can't boss me. You keep back a proper distance; and you keep that ugly mouth shet. I'll settle with that young varmint."

But Moses, instead of falling back, briskly advanced a few steps, commanding:

"Come away. Lie down and sleep a bit."

"You get away from me," warned Ben, tugging at his holster.

Moses' hand came forward and displayed a revolver.

"Now keep your hand away from that gun. You're drunk, you fool! Let the girl alone and go into the cabin and sleep. You, Kirk; get him away. You're not as drunk as he. I tell you mischief will be done here if this keeps on."

It was true, even as the gambler had said, that the whisky had not yet reduced Kirk to his friend's mad plane; and yet it had had time to warp his judgment. He desired Ben to retire, but he could not refrain from saying:

"You ain't standing in Bill Mayfield's shoes yet. And you can't play any of George's games on us."

Ben, who had taken a few unsteady steps toward the men's cabin, halted at this speech. At the moment Moses' attention was held by the appearance of Miss Matilda's white face at the half-opened door. She cried out in horror and endeavored to warn him.

"Catch!" he called to her, and sent the heavy thirty-six spinning toward her. It struck her hands and slipped through them, but she caught it again and closed the door.

Then the gambler faced about. Kirk, flushed of face, and with a new, mad impulse showing in his eyes, had him covered.

"Reckon it's your turn to eat crow," he announced.

"Put that gun up!" harshly commanded Moses. "Are you crazy drunk as quick as this? I'm tired of keeping watch of you two. The girl has a gun and will look out for herself."

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The boring gaze of the cold, merciless eyes quickly had the desired effect. Kirk's excited brain took time to remember George and his ways, also Mayfield. He slowly lowered his weapon and shoved it into his belt.

"Reckon we're going too fast, Ben," he told his friend, who was once more fumbling with his holster.

With a yelp of glee Ben managed to get his gun loose and shouted—

"Faster things move the better I like it." And he discharged the revolver point blank, killing the gambler instantly.

Kirk stared in horror at the fallen man. Ben, with smoking weapon held half-raised, also stared; and something of fear began working up through the whisky mists in his round head.

"By ——! Now you've done it!" whispered Kirk.

"I ain't no man's dawg to be kicked 'round," defended Ben, but with a whine creeping into his voice. "S'pose there'll be —— to pay when George and Bill git back!"

"Not for me to pay," fiercely retorted Kirk. "There's only one way out of it."

The cabin door began creeping open. Kirk sensed the danger and seized Ben by the arm and dragged him to the second cabin. When Miss Matilda's white face appeared the two men were tumbling into their cabin. She fired once, the lead streaking close to Kirk. Then she took time to shift her gaze and beheld the dead gambler. With a terrible scream she dragged the door to and sank to her knees and held her arm across her eyes as if to blot out the picture of the murdered man.

In the second cabin Kirk was groaning:

"Of all the mix-ups! You —— fool! Why did you kill him?"

"You started to. You had your gun on him," defended Ben, his brain beginning to clear. "I won't stand by and see a pard put down. You started to shoot."

"I was crazy! Of all the mix-ups! See his cards there? While you was gone he told my fortune. Said you'n me would die close together. Saw open graves beside both of us."

"Then I'm glad the hound is dead!" screamed Ben, fear and drunken rage surging through him.

"And he told his own fortune and found himself dead," whispered Kirk. "That part's come true. Next you'n' me——"

"No, no!" hoarsely objected Ben. "Why waste time jawing each other? He's dead. We're alive. His —— cards lied—about you'n' me— What's the one way out you spoke of?"

"Take the girl and ride for it. We can make terms with Bill and George as long as we have her. At least they won't dare shoot us. They've got a big game on, and it all depends on her. They'll be afraid we'll do for her and spoil their game. We must start for Texas and keep her with us till we're sure they ain't on our trail."

Ben rubbed his head violently to collect his thoughts; then remembered, and cried:

"But she's got a gun! Let's leave her and strike out now!"

"And be run down and shot. Bint and Gerry could follow our trail to —— and back. Besides, she slapped my face last night. We're in for it as much as we ever can be. She has five shots left. We must wait till dark; then play Injun."

WASHOE was confident he could arrive at Gold Hill ahead of the news of the Virginia City tragedy. The mare carried him swiftly and he reached the town without hindrance. The hour was very late, but the friendly bartender should be on duty. He left his mare before the Virginia House and entered the bar. To his great relief the place was deserted, owing to a general exodus of the miners to the hill town.

'Hello, Mister Washoe. Glad to see you," yawned the bartender, and he mechanically drew a glass of beer. "You're covered with dust enough to have done some hard riding. Wasn't Virginy lively enough that you had to come down here?"

Washoe washed the dust from his throat and hurriedly explained:

"In a pickle again, Jimmy. Who's that?" And he pointed to a man in the corner.

"Furriner. He can't *sabe*. Organ-grinder. Got a busted snoot trying to find how far it is to Virginy. Letting him stay here as he's in borrasca. He tried to stop a covered wagon this side of Dayton just as it was turning toward the river, and the driver kicked in his face. Poor devil's all upset."

Washoe lowered his voice to a whisper

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and explained his predicament, and in concluding said:

"So I must keep low till I learn how Virginia feels toward me. And while staying clear of the town I must keep up my hunt for the young lady. You haven't seen, nor heard anything?"

Jimmy shook his head nervously.

"No word reached here yet, but it may come any minute. Some of the boys will be straggling back any time now. You'd better let me store you away in my room. No one seen you here but the furriner, and he don't count. If he ever meets the man who kicked him he'll knife him if he stretches for it the next minute. Feller must have been drunk to be driving a covered wagon into the Carson in the night when the town was just ahead of him."

Washoe nodded impatiently and said:

"I'll put my mare up and risk it that no one recognizes her. Then I'll take your room. Stable man is all right?"

"You come to my room now before any of the boys git back. I'll take care of the mare. The hostler won't yip after I've talked to him."

Consumed with concern for Miss Matilda and with helpless rage because of his inability to succor her, Washoe followed the bartender to a small room at the front of the attic floor and threw himself on the bed. He did not believe he could sleep any, but the excitement of the night demanded an antidote, and toward morning he slept.

The sun was shining through the small window when he awoke. On a chair beside his bed was a tray of food and a pot of coffee. The coffee was luke-warm, and he knew Jimmy must have visited him when going off duty. He hurriedly ate and stepped to the window to survey the road below. He was shocked to find the sun so high and felt somewhat nonplused in deciding his next move. His original plan had been to leave Gold Hill early and take up his search for the girl along the California road. He believed her abductors had concealed her somewhere between Virginia and Carson City, where abandoned tunnels and deserted diggings afforded many snug hiding-places. The matter of food would necessitate that she be taken to some spot near a town.

As he gazed down on the straggling procession of ore teams, freight wagons, horsemen, and men on foot his attention was suddenly attracted by the frantic behavior of the foreigner, the organ-grinder. The fellow had darted from the hotel and into Washoe's range of vision, and was making for two horsemen who were turning in from the stage road. The organ- grinder rushed upon a man with a beard and attempted to pull him from the saddle. The man promptly swung his horse about and fended off the infuriated fellow until he could draw a revolver. He raised the weapon, but his companion reached over and seized the uplifted arm and said something that induced him to replace the weapon. Then the peacemaker lessened the foreigner's ire and sent him limping to the rear of the house by tossing him several coins. Although Washoe's line of vision precluded his getting a look at the faces of the horsemen the man with the beard was reminiscent of some one he had met. The two vanished from his sight when they rode up to the hotel entrance.

Washoe turned back to the stand and basin of water, washed, and was drying himself on the coarse towel when a soft rap on the door put him on his guard.

"It's me, Jimmy," called a low voice. "Awake yet?"

"Come in."

The bartender, bleary of eyes for need of sleep, slipped inside and sat down on the edge of the bed, and in a trembling voice informed him—

"George and Bill Mayfield are downstairs."

"When did they come? Have they seen my mare? Are they after me?"

"Just come a few minutes ago. Hosses out front; showing they plan to stop. Organ-grinder tried to comb Bill. Says Bill's the feller who kicked him in the face."

Washoe's eyes opened widely and he pursed his lips in a soft whistle.

"Then it was George wearing the soft hat. And I never knew him," he whispered. "Saw them from the window."

Jimmy, sadly frightened, and with his head turned sideways as if expecting to hear stealthy steps along the narrow hall, nodded violently.

"They just rode in from Dayton way. Furriner last night said the covered wagon turned off toward the waste country beyond the Carson just before reaching Dayton."

"They're back from hiding the girl!" gritted Washoe, rapidly strapping on his

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guns. "I'll go down and shoot the truth out of them."

"Oh, Mister Washoe! Don't!" begged Jimmy. "They'll kill you in your tracks!"

"Maybe I'll do the killing," said Washoe.

"Then there won't be any one left to tell you where the girl's hid. Don't go down. It's the girl you want first. They can wait."

Washoe's mad impulse was checked by this reference to Miss Matilda. The two men had driven a light covered wagon in the night out of the beaten track of travel. To kill them would help the girl none. To be killed would leave her at their mercy. He stepped to the window and pondered over his course of action.

As he was weighing the girl's predicament against his hate for the two men he saw them ride back into the road and make off for Virginia City. Their stop had been long enough only for George to drink several glasses of water and for Mayfield to resort to the whisky bottle.

Washoe knew the country intimately. He muttered:

"They turned and crossed the Carson north of El Dorado Cañon. They could have found a place in the cañon, or they might have traveled southwest and entered that high valley. I've always wanted to prospect. The cañon would be hard to leave in a hurry if their hiding-place was found. But from the valley they could strike across to the east and hit the Walker River road and follow it south to White Mountains, or cross it and make for the overland road and pass through the Toiyabe Range to Salt Lake. George came from Sale Lake and has friends there. If he could get the girl back there it would almost be impossible to get her out. According to her tell she and her father aren't remembered very kindly there. But if George and Bill are going back to Virginia then they must have left some one to guard her."

"I don't understand all you're saying, but it sounds like hoss-sense," declared Jimmy.

Washoe smiled bitterly and said:

"They have gone. I know where to find them—at Virginia City. Your talk, Jimmy, is mighty good. No sense in my getting killed just now. I'll follow their back trail and hunt for the little lady. Find out what's the latest word from Virginia; if I'm still wanted."

"That's what I was going to tell you when them two came in and drove every thought out of my head. Men came back from the hill early this morning before I brought up your breakfast. They say the town's quieted down; that the Magnolia people proved Moses to be a liar. They let French Fannie go—she took the stage for Sacramento this morning—seeing she killed t'other woman by mistake. Folks up there don't hold any grudge against you for shooting Hawkins. John Blackburn and your other friends are all telling how it was in self-defense. And every one knows Hawkins wa'n't any good. So you can ride away openly and not be troubled."

"Well, that's something to be thankful for," sighed Washoe. "Yet I don't want any of Mayfield's men to see me if I can help it. Have my mare brought to the back door. I'll sneak out that way."

"I'll fetch her myself," volunteered Jimmy.

IN ANOTHER twenty minutes Washoe was riding down the Silver City road. On reaching the town he entered a general store and called the proprietor to one side. He had sold the man a few feet the spring before which had happened to net a rich return.

"Oscom, my talk with you is confidential," he began.

"Anything I can do for you, Washoe, will be done gladly. If you've got something that looks good I'll buy."

"If you can pick up some feet in the Gopher Hole in Flowery Diggings you'll be making no mistake."

"Folks have been laughing because you got rid of some of that to a Frisco banker. They said you were mighty keen."

"I'd rather have it that way; but the laugh is on me. It's a rich strike, only I didn't know it till after I'd sold. But my errand here is outside of business. Do you know, Oscom, if George and Bill Mayfield stopped here late last night, or very early this morning."

"I'm positive they didn't. If they had some of the customers, or my clerks, would be talking about it. But I do know that the man George nearly caused a row at Dayton this morning. He broke up some kind of a fight. Of course the boys crawled when they found out who he was. He was wearing a soft hat instead of his 'tall-slick' and at first they didn't recognize him.

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Human nature is funny. If no one had recognized him and they had lit into him they would have done for him even if he killed several of them. But as soon as they heard his name they all crawled."

"Thanks, Oscom. I'm in a hurry. Don't forget about the Gopher Hole. I have fifty feet, and no man can buy them."

He mounted and pushed his quest at Dayton. A quarter of a mile from the town he halted and examined the country on his left. He was near a ford of the Carson, and he believed the covered wagon driven by Mayfield had turned from the stage road at this point. Before venturing into the barren lands east of the river he decided to seek information at Dayton. He rode on to the town and entered a groggery. He wore his hat pulled low and secured a table in the corner and ordered a breakfast he had no intention of eating. Then he used his ears and eyes. The crowd was talking and grumbling about the interrupted badger fight at the south end of the town. Washoe followed the exclamatory recital while pretending to read an old copy of *The Silver Age*.

"Wish I'd been there," repeated a carpenter, who was armed only with a hammer and saw. "Wish I'd been there; that's all. He wouldn't a put *me* down and made *me* eat dirt."

"Take another drink, Sammy, and you'll be going to Virginy for to saw him to death," some one jeered.

As the laughter subsided the saloon door flew open with much noise and caused Washoe to lift his head. There was something familiar in the profile of the newcomer as he crowded unceremoniously up to the bar, but Washoe could not decide where he had seen him before. The carpenter, peevish at the crowd's raillery, complained:

"Plenty of room, stranger. Be careful, how you dig your elbow into my back."

"Is that so?" And the man pushed back his hat and rocked on his heels and advanced his flushed face close to the shrinking visage of the carpenter. "Just say that again so every one can hear; then I'll talk to you."

"Quit it, Sammy. One of Mayfield's men," warned a voice down the bar.

The newcomer stretched his neck to locate the voice. The carpenter took the opportunity to retreat. Washoe raised the newspaper and concealed all but his eyes. He remembered the fellow now as one of the characters he had seen several times in Virginia City. None of the crowd cared to return the man's belligerent stare. He loudly and profanely expressed himself about all people who were "chicken-livered" and called for a drink. Tossing it off he called for another. Then for good measure he bought a jug of whisky. As he slapped some money on the bar he told the gathering:

"Mebbe I trail after Bill Mayfield, and mebbe I don't. But I pay as I go. Any talk?"

"You pay as you go, and you pay well," heartily cried the proprietor, fearing he might lose a week's profits by having his back mirror shot to pieces. "Glad to have you with us. The boys don't mean to be oncivil. Every one have a drink with me."

Somewhat mollified by this speech Mayfield's man expressed himself as believing in the old adage "live and let live," and was pleased to accept a glass of the raw whisky. Then he picked up the jug and swaggered from the room and to his horse. Washoe left his corner and from the window watched the man ride toward Silver City. A long wagon-train was kicking up a thick cloud of dust abreast the river ford. By the time Washoe was in the saddle the man had entered this cloud. Washoe allowed the mare to quicken her stride as the suspect vanished, but slowed down to a walk on encountering the dust. By the time he was opposite the ford the strong west wind had cleared the air and permitted him to glimpse the bobbing figure of a horseman riding to the southeast on the other side of the Carson. Waiting until the man vanished in a hollow Washoe sent the mare into the river and slowly followed what appeared to be the faint trace of a trail.

After leaving the arable land that bordered the river the trail wound in and out through the broken country. Washoe proceeded at a walk, sharply scrutinizing every bit of cover. For several miles he alternated between a sharp gallop and a walk, occasionally catching a fleeting glimpse of the horseman. Then for several miles he lost him entirely, with the country taking on a mountainous character. He was following what appeared to be an ancient river-bed, and he knew it would lead him into the elevated valley he had often wished to investigate for mineral lands. As the

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miles were covered without his sighting the horseman he began to fear the man had discovered him and had planned an ambush. And yet the fellow was somewhat befuddled with drink and would not be practicing ordinary caution. Washoe mounted the gradual grade, with brown skulls of mountains showing over the parallel ridges. The clumps of greasewood and patches of sagebrush dotting the valley floor, and the occasional stunted pines, added to, rather than relieved, the desolation of the scene.

It was sometime after midday that his cautious advance was temporarily checked by the faint sound of a shot. He slid to the ground and shaded his eyes and scanned the foreshortened skyline ahead. A faint wisp of smoke caught his gaze. As he stared at it and endeavored to estimate the distance a second shot sounded. Jumping into the saddle he galloped on until the smoke appeared to be rising from a point just beyond a bend in the valley. He turned in among a chaos of boulders and found a spot where the mare would be unobserved by any one passing up or down the valley.

"You be a good girl and stay here," he whispered. She rubbed her velvet muzzle on his shoulder and watched him as he stole away.

KEEPING close to the line of scattered rocks he carefully scouted the bend and halted only when he came in sight of two cabins. He studied the two buildings for some time, surprized that the valley should have any habitations. If prospectors had erected them they would have made their occupancy known while trading at the Carson towns. He began to suspect the truth—that he had stumbled upon one of the hiding-places of a lawless gang.

He drew back his head as a man stepped outside the door of the second cabin and shouted something. At first Washoe feared he had been discovered and that the fellow was calling to him. The distance prevented him from being sure, but he believed the man was one of Mayfield's companions when George drove the quartet from the Magnolia bar. The man called again and then suddenly bolted through the doorway. As he leaped for cover there came a flash and a loud explosion from the small window of the nearer cabin.

"At least a thirty-six to talk that way," muttered Washoe, quivering with excitement as he believed he was beginning to understand the situation.

Hostile forces held the two cabins. Whoever was in the first cabin was on the defensive, or else the fellow in the second would not have advanced into the open. His act was that of a besieger demanding a surrender. As no further signs of life were to be noticed Washoe's gaze more carefully examined the surroundings. His eye followed along the connecting roof of the two structures, then dropped to search the intervening space. For the first time he observed the figure on the ground midway between the cabins. For some minutes he watched the quiet form, and then decided:

"A live man couldn't keep as still as that. Chap's dead. Must have been shot by whoever's in the first cabin. Prisoner must be Miss Matilda! Lord! What a nervy little lady!"

Exulting in this conclusion he began to form plans for raising the siege. Now two heads appeared in the doorway of the second cabin. One of them was the man who had carried the jug. His companion was waving a piece of cloth as though inviting the inmate of the first cabin to a parley. This demonstration excited no sign of life on the part of the besieged. The men stepped back from view. Several minutes passed before they showed activity; then what appeared to be the head of a man, wearing his hat low, was thrust from the doorway. Washoe glimpsed an arm and hand at the small window and the vague outline of a countenance; and the hand was gripping a heavy revolver. With the crack of the gun the hat flew from the end of the blanket-draped stick; and loud guffaws announced the second cabin's glee at having drawn the enemy's fire.

"But if it's Miss Matilda in there how did she get hold of a gun?" puzzled Washoe. "Must have taken it from the dead man. And who killed him? Well, I never can find out by staying here."

He worked back below the bend and began climbing up among the broken rocks, seeking a way across the rugged promontory which would permit him to approach the first cabin unseen by those in the second. He was in sight of the two cabins and considerably above them, and could see the horse-hovel and the covered wagon. Then followed the most dangerous part of his

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advance, the descent of the rough slope to a point directly behind the end of the first cabin. Once he started he was forced to continue, and there were bare ledges to be crossed. Had the men below had eyes for anything besides the besieged cabin they might have discovered him. As it was he reached the valley floor without hearing any yell of discovery. Now that he was in line with the two habitations he could not see the second cabin, and so long as the men remained under cover they could not behold him. Although the inmate of the first cabin was a prisoner the desperadoes could not stir from shelter without running the risk of being shot.

Washoe halted behind the last bit of cover, a clump of sage-brush, and examined his guns before making his last advance. The sound of ribald singing told him the jug of whisky was being passed. With a weapon in each hand he rose and darted forward. He had covered half the distance when a shot rang out, closely followed by howls of anger and a fusillade of bullets.

As Washoe reached the end of the cabin and found a small opening through which he could view the interior, a second volley plumped harmlessly into the front of the structure. By the savage profanity and terrible threats he knew neither of the men could be seriously hurt by the prisoner's shot. At first he could make out but little of the room behind the logs. However, after the sun-glare had left his eyes he discovered Miss Matilda's mop of curls at the small window. She was standing on a box, with her back to him, and her small head nearly masked the opening. As he gazed at her she commenced sobbing softly, as a woman weeps when miserable at heart and quite hopeless. Substituting lips for eyes at the crevice he hoarsely whispered:

"Miss Matilda! Miss Matilda!"

The sobbing ceased instantly and he heard the click of the gun being cocked.

"It's Washoe," he hastily whispered. "Don't shoot."

"Where are you?" she faintly demanded.

"At the end of the cabin. Back here behind you. I came hunting for you. Don't fret any more. Don't cry."

"Oh, Mister Washoe!" she moaned.

"Don't!" he begged. "Stop fretting.'

"It's because I'm so happy," she whimpered, descending from the box and approaching the logs. "I've only two shots left. One of them for myself. Oh, you don't know! No one can know what wickedness is till they've seen what I have seen.

He squeezed through a finger for her to shake, and she clutched it and hurriedly murmured:

"It's like you, Mister Washoe! And after I've been such an ugly little fool!"

"No time for that. Tell me what's up. I've seen two men. Any more?"

"The dead man. They killed him after he gave me a revolver. They're Mayfield's men. Drunk and going against orders. They killed the man called Moses; now they're afraid of Mayfield and George. They're trying to get me to empty my gun so they can come in. They want to take me away and keep me so Mayfield and George won't shoot them."

"By the way they were taking on your last bullet must have done some damage.

"I was a fool. One of them waved the jug outside the door. I fired before I thought and busted the jug. Now they can't get any drunker they say they'll tear me to pieces."

"That's all ended. I'll attend to them."

"Mister Washoe, if you don't want to make me shoot myself, don't you show yourself. Don't think they can't shoot straight because of the drink. You never could make three feet toward their cabin without being killed. If they can be held off till night you might get me away. But Mayfield and George may come back any minute."

Washoe glanced uneasily toward the bend, but reassured her:

"They'll not be back today. I'll out-Injun them. No matter what they try don't waste any more lead until they open the door. I shall be right here. Is there any place where you can watch them without running the risk of being shot?"

"There's a crack between the two lower logs. By lying on the floor I can see if they show themselves."

"Then go on watch. I'll stay here. If they come in sight I'll get them. Don't worry any more."

He heard her steal across the earth floor and take her position. When he applied an eye to the crevice he could glimpse the top of her head where a thin beam of sunlight touched the top of her curls. The men had exhausted their stock of blasphemy and

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were quiet. Washoe wished they would make a noise. He doubly wished the girl had spared the jug. Their mood now must be murderous, he knew; and he was fearing they would resume firing in the hope of a bullet hitting the girl.

He stole to the corner of the cabin and peered out toward the horse-hovel. One of the men was thrusting his head and shoulders from a window as if contemplating leaving the cabin. Washoe, lying flat on the ground, took a long shot, and the fellow ducked back with a howl of alarm.

Miss Matilda was back at the crevice and fiercely demanding—

"What's the matter?"

He rapidly explained, and added—

"Of course they think it's you."

At once she replied:

"Then they're believing I have only one more shot left. If either of us shoot again they'll rush the cabin. Be careful."

She stole back to her post while Washoe considered the situation from a new angle. He could draw them from cover by firing another shot. He was confident he could pick them off as they ran to enter the girl's cabin. And yet there was ever the chance of one of them gaining the cabin. The risk would have been infinitesimally little had he only himself to consider, but he dared not run even a shadow of a chance when her safety was involved. He knew it was impossible to get her out the back end of the cabin and yet he examined the logs eagerly. Even had he had suitable tools it would require too much time to make an opening through the logs.

A voice from the end of the second cabin harshly called out:

"You girl in there. Can you hear me?"

"I hear you."

"We know you've got just one bullet left. You come out and behave and you won't be hurt any. You can keep the gun. You'll be better off with us than with George and Mayfield. They've planned to take you to Reese Valley, get your father to sell his claim at their own price so's to have you set free. But if he buys you of them they'll do for the two of you and swear you went back to the States. If you go with us you'll have to ride till we put a good distance atween us and them, and then you're free to go where you want to."

"If I don't do as you say?"

"Then one of us will get you and you'll be mighty sorry. We'll risk the bullet. One's bound to get inside that cabin."

"I've been saving the bullet for myself. Now I'm remembering I have a knife. I'll shoot the first man that shows at the door." There was no reply to this defiance.

In fact, the two desperadoes were in a quandary. To leave the valley without the girl would place them at the mercy of the Mayfield gang and George should they be overtaken. Neither Mayfield, nor the killer, would overlook their offense. The breaking of the jug had caused them to forget for a few minutes their own safety, and in their blind rage they had peppered the front of the cabin with bullets. Now their wits were clearing and the stimulus of the whisky to their courage was failing. They must take the girl with them as a hostage. They were as eager to be out of the valley as was the unsuspected Washoe. Like him they hungrily watched the sun as it inched its way down the western slope of blue heavens.

The girl returned to where Washoe was waiting. He expected she would talk about the desperadoes' last attempt to trick her. Instead she said—

"I know about that woman who was killed to save you from being shot."

"She wasn't much older'n you," sadly replied Washoe. "It was all over before I knew what had happened."

"She must 'a' liked you a heap." This in the thinnest of whispers.

"Only because I got a doctor to her when she was sick. What I did was nothing. I reckon I didn't even do her a kindness in digging up that doctor. She never had a chance to be happy. Life owed her much and paid her nothing. Never one of her prospects ever assayed out a single color, I reckon."

"Then she's having her chance now," murmured Miss Matilda.

"I believe so. If she isn't then everything's an awful mistake." She left him, and he had the uncomfortable feeling she was silently weeping.

Washoe found himself worrying about the mare. She would stay behind the rocks until suspicious he was not coming back; then she would start a search for him. To his study of the lazy sun he added many glances toward the bend, and each time he feared he would see the mare coming up

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the road. From the second cabin came a new sound.

The girl came to the logs and warned—

"They're making or breaking something."

"They're out of whisky. They must be making something. Perhaps shields to hold before them when they rush the door. If they try that I'll take them on the flank Better go back and watch."

"That man—the gambler—I see him every time I look out. I can't bear it much longer."

"He was a heartless beast. Don't waste pity on him. The only decent thing he ever did was to toss you the gun. He had his own purpose in doing that. Go back and watch."

She obeyed and soon was loudly crying for his benefit:

"I see what you're up to! I see the end of those planks sticking out the door. You'll have to drop them when you open the door, and I shall shoot!"

Washoe crept to the corner and crawled along the side of the cabin until he could watch the narrow opening between the two cabins. Moses, grinning sardonically, was stretched out a few feet from him. He could not see the doorway of the enemies' cabin, but he could hear them cursing and knew by the sound of their voices they were outside.

Then what looked like two tall boxes came into view. The ruffians had wrenched loose the box-bunks and were cautiously approaching the girl's cabin. The bunks were made of stout planks and in removing them from the wall the men had been careful not to separate the sides from the bottoms. The narrow barriers were hard to hold erect without showing a hand or an arm. Believing a shot would tempt them to discard the planks Washoe fired at the nearest. Kirk yelped in alarm and jostled against his companion, whose heavy device dipped and swayed. Kirk was crying:

"Look out! She's outside the cabin! Round the corner to your right!"

Miss Matilda was credited with the shots Washoe had fired. In reality she had two bullets left in her revolver, but was unable to use them so long as the door remained barred, or the chase failed to lead within range of the small window. In her despair she screamed loudly, fearing her friend did not sense his peril. But Washoe already was scrambling back along the wall.

"The gun's empty! Get her!" cried Ben.

He was the first to turn the corner and Washoe's bullet caught him in the shoulder and caused him to stagger against the building. Kirk, behind him, exclaimed in amazement on beholding a man where he had expected to find a frightened woman. He crowded behind his companion. Washoe pulled the trigger of his second gun, and the cartridge failed to explode. Ben fired and hit him in the calf of his leg, knocking his feet from under him. As he sat down Washoe fired with his right-hand gun, killing Ben in his tracks. Before the man could fall Kirk was supporting him with his left arm and firing over his shoulder, and backing the few steps necessary to take him to the corner. Then he abandoned the corpse and made a rush for the second cabin.

But Washoe had limped after him and dropped to one knee just as Kirk was about to vanish. Kirk wasted the fraction of a second in glancing back and firing from his hip. At the same moment Washoe's gun discharged. Kirk's revolver slipped from his hand, and, turning half-about, lifted one foot as if about to mount a step, and instead stepped off from the world. Washoe fell over on his side, for a minute stunned by the raking impact of a bullet that had cut a red swath through his brown locks.

INSIDE the cabin the terrified girl was hurling her slight form against the door in a futile attempt to force the outside bar. Her screams brought her defender to his senses, and lifting himself to one elbow he whistled long and shrilly on two fingers. The mare answered him and the second signal brought her galloping toward the cabin. He called her to him, and managed to grip a stirrup and pull himself up until he could lean across the saddle. Then he guided her to the door and managed to dislodge the bar. He lost his balance, and feeling sick and giddy slumped to the ground as Miss Matilda burst from her prison.

She dropped beside him, big tears streaming down her small face, and pillowed his bloody head on her lap.

"Oh, Mister Washoe! I've brought death to you! Oh, why couldn't I 'a' died like that other woman!"

"I'm all right," muttered Washoe. "See if there's water in the cabin."

She ran back into her own cabin and



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brought out a bucketful. She held the bucket while he drank and then bathed the ugly scalp wound. Now that she believed he would live she was a border woman and would not allow either sentiment or grief to interfere with her duty. She not only dressed his head and improvised a cold pack, held in place by a bandage improvised from a strip torn from her petticoat, but she removed his patent-leather boot and bathed the flesh wound in his leg.

"Leg hasn't bled much," she muttered. "But both of them will smart and hurt for a few days."

"They don't amount to anything. Gunshot wounds in this climate heal fast," he assured her as he raised himself to a sitting posture. "Go to the other cabin and see if you can't find a rifle. Any extra hand guns. Throw out any supplies. Then bring up the covered wagon. I'm sorry, but you'll have to do the work. And you may have to drive at the first of it."

"I can drive better than you can. I drove across the plains," she told him. "I'll get you to a town in no time where you can have a doctor."

"We'll steer clear of the towns, Miss Matilda. I won't be in shape to meet any of Mayfield's gang, or George, for a few days. In Dayton or any other town along the Carson we'd have some of them down on us in no time. And I'd be killed without a chance to defend myself. Now they've got into this they'll do everything to carry it through."

"Then where shall we go?" she asked in deep dismay.

"To the Reese River valley to find your pap. When two drunken ruffians can hit me twice it shows I'm not up to meeting their boss, or George. I'll tell you where to go and we'll dodge the towns after dark. So get all the supplies you can find. Throw all the blankets into the wagon. The mare will follow without being led."

## CHAPTER XI

### BORRASCA AND BONANZA

ALTHOUGH Miss Matilda insisted they should travel to Dayton and find a doctor Washoe followed his plan of conducting the girl to her father. She surrendered only when she believed a visit to any of the settlements would result in his being slain by George or some of the Mayfield gang. With Washoe reclining on a couch of blankets the girl sent the horses through the night, the mare keeping close to the end of the wagon to be near her master. They were making for the road which crossed the insignificant Reese River at Jacob's overland station, laid out in Fifty-four by John Reese, but not opened until 1860 when that pioneer guided a detachment of Johnston's army over it.

Washoe knew the overland coach used two days and a night from Virginia City to Jacob's station, but how long it would require for the covered wagon to make the trip was a matter of speculation. They halted between Six-Mile Cañon and Fort Churchill just as the sun was rising. While the horses were feeding along the river Miss Matilda quickly cooked breakfast and brought water from the Carson and bathed Washoe's wounds.

His head and leg were inflamed and pained him much. Miss Matilda placed a hand on his head and found it hot with fever. Washoe made light of his hurts although secretly dreading lest they incapacitate him in the time of trouble. It would be many hours before their flight would be known to Mayfield and George, he bravely assured her. She pretended to believe this, but she knew they would be meeting travelers who would remember seeing them. A girl driving a sick man into the sage-brush deserts and the barren alkali country was a spectacle to attract attention.

After they had eaten and were ready to proceed Washoe decided he would ride on the seat. Before they had traveled two miles he was glad to return to the blankets and rest his dizzy head. Miss Matilda became so seriously alarmed over his condition that she would have turned back had not Washoe made the counter proposal:

"We'll stop at Fort Churchill. It's only a short distance ahead. To satisfy you, Granny Worry, we'll have the post doctor look me over. He's a friend of mine. If we're lucky we can change horses."

The road along the Carson was pleasant, although dusty, and the girl remembered her ride from Genoa to Carson City. To immigrant wagons and west-bound stagecoaches it seemed a paradise after the interminable stretches of sage-brush and alkali farther east.

When within half a mile of the fort a

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wagon-train and a dozen lean beeves forced the girl to draw out one side. Riding at the rear of the train were two men, whose attention was attracted by sight of the girl, apparently alone and making for the desolate waste beyond Carson lake. They pulled out of the road and drew up close to the wheel. Washoe turned on his side and lifted himself on one elbow and secured a look at the bearded faces, and promptly loosened his two hand guns. He recognized them as Bint and Gerry, two of Mayfield's most reckless followers.

"Ain't you lost, miss?" asked Bint as he stared into the gray eyes.

"No."

"You look mighty like some one we know," spoke up Gerry.

"I'm taking a sick man to Fort Churchill," she replied.

They peered by her at the muffled figure in the wagon.

"Soldier, huh?" mused Bint. "Sick, huh?"

"Hit twice by bullets in a fight."

The men backed their horses a few feet. Gerry declared:

"Danged if she don't make me think of some one I've known. Some one we've both seen within a short time. Most likely at Virginy City."

The girl eyed him without interest. Bint caught the resemblance and his brows contracted. Then he exclaimed—

"Why, she looks like the singing-gal at the Magnolia!"

"Dead center! That's what I was trying to remember. The little singing-gal at the Magnolia."

Miss Matilda gaped at him blankly.

"Going beyond Churchill?" asked Bint.

The girl shook her head.

"We live on a hay-farm. Took some turnips and 'taters to Silver City. Fetching this man back to the fort."

"Your fort will be empty of soldiers soon," continued Bint. "The Paiutes are out on the Humboldt at the mouth of the Reese, close to Battle Mountain. They'll be coming down the Reese valley to take a whack at Jacob's station. And while the soldiers are gone to meet 'em some more will raid Churchill. Better draw in closer to town."

"Whose mare is that?" demanded Gerry suddenly, his eyes shining covetously.

"Post doctor's. Went lame on him in Silver City nigh a week ago. Pretty near well now; so I'm fetching her back."

The two desperadoes exchanged glances. Bint shook his head slightly. It was broad daylight and too many were passing. Besides, it wasn't policy to steal Fort Churchill stock.

"Sure you ain't the singing-gal?" asked Gerry.

"I can sing a little. Not much," timidly replied Miss Matilda.

"The one we mean can sing a lot," informed Bint, backing his horse from the wheel.

Miss Matilda called out shrilly and sent the horses into the road, remarking—

"Can't be visiting here all day when a sick man needs a doctor."

For a fraction of a minute the two men hesitated, but the girl's bearing won, and they reined further aside and allowed the wagon to proceed. With a sigh of relief Washoe replaced his guns and peeped out from under the end covering. The two men were in the middle of the road and looking after the wagon as if still suspicious. For a couple of minutes he believed they were about to pursue.

"Drive slow," he cautioned the girl. "They're watching us. They half-suspect you played a game on them. If I begin shooting crouch low and use the whip."

But the horsemen finally resumed their journey toward the settlements, only now they rode at full speed. Washoe directed the girl to halt a short distance from the fort and said:

"Ask for Dr. Benton. Tell him my name and say I've been shot. When he comes out I'll see about getting fresh horses."

The girl hastened to the fort, where a small force was maintained to guard the road should there be a recurrence of the Indian war that had devastated certain sections of the valley for the last few years. Very soon Washoe heard steps and was much relieved when Dr. Benton drew back the canvas and climbed into the wagon. He directed the girl to raise one of the sides to admit more light, and remarked:

"Been getting into mischief. Must have sold some one a mine and made him mad."

"Lead mine," murmured Washoe.

The doctor removed the bandages, cleansed the wounds and dressed them, and said:

"You come inside and rest, Washoe. Too

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much dust and dirt and jolting to be traveling alone—and toward the east." He darted a quick, curious glance at the girl.

"We must go on, doctor. I'm taking this young lady to her father."

"Thought she was taking you. You crawl out and let me fix you up at the fort."

"That's what I want him to do," said Matilda.

"He's slightly feverish. He may get worse," mumbled the doctor. "Given a decent chance he'd mend quick."

"See here, doctor; this young woman must get to her father quick. Bill Mayfield and a fellow called Gentle George are determined she sha'n't reach her father. We're going through to Reese River and you're not going to mention to any one that you've seen us. We must have two fresh horses. And we're in a hurry as we've just met two of the gang who are mighty curious about us. When they reach Virginia they'll learn who we are and they'll bring the gang after us. Once I turn the young lady over to her father I'll lose my fever and get well over night."

"You and the young lady will be perfectly safe here, even though a dozen Mayfields and Georges come after you."

"We must find her father, as the gang plans to jump him. He knows nothing of what's been going on. Tell them to bring the horses and I'll tell you the story."

"I'll order the horses, but I'm not saying that you can go on, Washoe."

Then he placed aside his professional manner and roosted on the tailboard and eagerly listened while Washoe sketched the tragedy at Virginia City and the fight in the lonely valley. When the recital was finished the doctor swore softly and admiringly, and declared:

"You couldn't be killed with an axe, Washoe! You shall go on and warn her dad. You're traveling light and should go through quick. If they ask for you here we'll swear you went down the Walker River road. Lord! But I'd liked to have been there! The beastly scum! Knew all of them by sight. Moses and Hawkins and the other two dead men! Good!"

THE fresh horses were soon hitched up, and the girl impatiently cracked her whip, and they were off. When she and her father crossed the country from Salt Lake they had followed the old immigrant road down the Humboldt, a longer and more hazardous route and open to Indian attacks. As they rattled along the Carson they were frequently coming to reminders of the Indian raids of the preceding year, when every pony-express station was broken up as far east as Dry Creek and Simpson's park. At midday they turned from the road to the river-bank and Washoe swung himself from the wagon to rest on the dusty grass while his companion prepared something to eat.

He believed he was more feverish, but lied and declared he already felt much better.

"We'll make Ragtown late in the afternoon, Miss Matilda," he encouraged. "Thank Heaven we haven't got to branch north over the old road through the Forty-mile desert. But we'll find it bad enough at the best. No wood in the valleys, and the road is always winding from one valley to another. Not even any sage-brush in the alkali stretches. Water will be our greatest trouble. We'll give the nags time to feed and rest at Ragtown, then make the rest of it fast."

"We'll pull through somehow, Mister Washoe," she agreed, turning her flushed face from the little fire to study him anxiously. "I was wicked to let you come out here. Can't think what's the matter with me. May turn round when we reach that Ragtown. Surely will, 'less you're lots better. The edge of nothing isn't any place for a sick man."

"I'm much better. We must find your father. You know what they plan against him."

She was worried. She tried to console herself by saying:

"They don't even know where pap is. We don't know where to find him. He may be wandering off to some new place by this time. He's a great hand to wander. Once when I was a little girl, before my mother died, he stepped out to perch a turkey for dinner. We didn't see him for six months. Just got curious and went wandering."

"We'll catch him no matter where he goes. Can't go back to town. Cards stacked against me."

After they had eaten he made apologies for not hitching up the horses, and pretended it was his leg that bothered him, whereas it was a sickening feeling of general weakness.

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"Shucks!" she scornfully replied. "I know more about that sort of work than you do. But I do hate to take you into that lonesome land. I ain't saying yet that we'll go beyond the lake. You've got to be all over your fever first."

As they traveled toward the north end of the lake the girl developed nervousness as shown by her frequent backward glances. She was watching for the dust of swift-riding horsemen. Late in the afternoon her attention was transferred to a smoke ahead. Washoe said it must be a wagon-train, tarrying to refresh their animals after coming through the desolation east of the lake.

"One fire. Two men," called out the girl as the wagon swung into view of the lake.

Washoe had no apprehensions that the wayfarers could be enemies, yet he requested the girl to halt before getting within pistol-shot. And he worked himself to a sitting posture and drew his guns. His head felt light, and he knew he was a sick man. Owing to the Summer's evaporation the lake was surrounded by mud-flats and presented an unlovely appearance. The camp-fire burned near the outlet, where the stream, fifty feet wide but shallow, broke loose to find the sink of the Carson.

The girl allowed the weary animals to come to a halt and then looked more sharply at the two men. She was positive she had seen one of them before. Washoe rose to his knees and peered out over the seat. The men were slowly approaching, and as he obtained a face view he exclaimed aloud in surprize and began working his way to the end of the wagon.

The girl now remembered, and softly cried—

"The man George struck in the Magnolia!"

WASHOE, now on the ground and leaning against the wagon, excitedly called out:

"Sorry Kane and Feeble Thomas! Friends of mine! But what are they doing here?"

Washoe waved his hand and shouted his name. The men, goggle-eyed with surprize, quickened their steps.

"Why, Washoe! What you doing way out here?" asked Kane.

"You've been hurt! You look sick!" cried Feeble Thomas.

They greeted him warmly, and he made Miss Matilda known to them, and explained how he was taking her to her father. Kane and Thomas glanced at each other in consternation. Kane turned to one side. Thomas hesitated, then explained:

"Jaimson ain't on the Reese any more. We met him a few miles east of here and gave him your message. He come back as far as here with us, and then swung up north. He'd heard of a rich strike up in the Oro-Fino country and left this place yesterday. Plans to look over the Snake River basin."

Washoe stared aghast. With a little cry the girl exclaimed:

"Ain't that like pap! I had a feeling he'd be wandering away again!"

"But you told him he should come to Virginia City?" demanded Washoe angrily.

Thomas nodded.

"He said he'd be back soon if things didn't look promising up north. He 'lowed no one would dare bother his daughter. So, Sorry and me have sorter been camping out here, waiting for some east-bound coach or wagon to fetch word that George had got his needings."

Washoe was nonplused over the situation. He limped to the fire and sat down and for several minutes held his head in his hands and tried to think. But his mind would not function clearly. He realized there was no further point in continuing the trip, and until he could shake off his weakness he knew it would not be safe for him to meet any of his enemies. He lifted his head and wearily told them—

"We'll stay here long enough to rest the horses; then we'll decide what to do."

"After seeing the country east of here you couldn't ask for a better camp," said Thomas. "There's a dash of alkali in the water and it looks 'mazingly like milk, but it's drinkable, ma'am."

"And there's Asa Kenyon's old shack still standing back a piece if you want it, miss," timidly added Kane. "Now, Washoe, we're mighty keen to hear what's been going on, and how you got hurt. Seems like it was years since we quit Virginy. If you don't feel able to talk——"

"Feel able?" wrathfully replied Washoe. "What are you trying to make out? Think a scratch on the head and a flesh wound in my leg can stop me from talking—or shooting, either? Tomorrow we'll start back for Virginia. I'll show you how able I feel."

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He said other things under his breath and decided he must be acting peculiar for the girl to stare at him so worriedly. With an effort he shook off the strange irascibility and quite calmly related his adventures with the enemy.

"Four of them plugged out!" cried Sorry. "That's mighty good! Only wish Mayfield and George was among them."

"If old Dragoon Jackson could come back to life he'd begin at the top and work down," sighed Feeble Thomas.

This remark stirred Washoe's resentment. It impressed him as being a criticism of his technique. He would have retorted rather savagely, but the girl interposed a question about her father's work on Reese River.

Sorry Kane explained:

"He struck some bluish-green quartz just east of Jacob's station, but soon got tired of working it. Said if he got it out it would cost too much to freight it to a mill. We told him what a rumpus his specimens had kicked up, but he thinks there's as good, or better, up north. We tried to get him to turn back, but he hankered to see that north country, and as long as he'd made a start for it he wanted to keep on going."

"Ain't that just like pap!" exclaimed Miss Matilda.

"Why didn't you two go on and look for the lost towns and the gold?" asked Washoe.

Sorry groaned and explained:

"Jaimson spent some time wandering round down there. He found a mess of gold bracelets, like the one I showed you. He dug up the sand quite promisc'ous, but didn't find any signs of the buried city. Fetched the gold back to the station and melted them down best he could and shipped them from there. Station hands all went crazy and quit the station to go prospecting, but didn't find anything. Feeble and me are thinking that Jaimson got all there was. Of course if we had time and money and could dig out a heap of sand we'd probably strike the buried city and get lots of the stuff. But if the station hands couldn't find any with all their digging it ain't likely Feeble and me could. And I've wasted all these years thinking about it!"

"Why, that must have been the bullion the Mayfield crowd stole," mumbled Washoe.

"Just so," said Thomas. "We told him that much. He was mad for a minute, then didn't seem to mind any. His mind was all cluttered up with yarns brought down from the Oro Fino."

Washoe essayed to wink the fever out of his eyes as he stole a glance at the girl. She was trying to conceal her disappointment and was finding it hard. He wondered if Miss Clapp at Carson City would take her back in the seminary. She would make it very difficult for him to help her, now she knew her father owned no rich claim.

"Have you any folks back East to go to?" he asked.

"No! I have connections who'd take me in; but no Jaimson yet ever went back and begged for shelter. It's better to be like pap and just keep wandering round than to go back and say you've been beaten. I'm through with the East. Every one back there is fighting. Pap Jaimson will turn up some day and he'll get a dressing-down he'll remember for a long time. Get well of your hurts, Mister Washoe, and go back to your work. You've spent enough time helping me."

"I've helped myself in helping you. Everything will come out all right," he told her.

She became busy with the cooking. Sorry tremulously tugged Washoe's sleeve and hoarsely whispered:

"Seems to me as if everything was mighty dark for all of us. You're the only fighting friend we've got, and you're played out."

"That's a —— lie! I'm just a bit tired—and my head aches. A good fight would brace me up." Then more calmly, "I'll give my leg a day or so to mend; then I'll go back."

"But there's that George!" groaned Sorry. "He's after me! Oh Lawd! Now he'll catch me! If I stay here he'll be finding me. If I go back——"

"If only Dragoon Jackson——"

"Shut up!" snarled Washoe. "He's pegged out. I'm the only one to stand between this outfit and sudden death. Old Jackson is buried. Leave him alone. You get on my nerves."

"I was just sort of wishing, that's all, Washoe," humbly replied Feeble.

"I know, I know. Don't mind anything I say, old friend. I'm not myself just now. Head feels queer, and I'm mad enough to eat greasewood," muttered Washoe, already ashamed of his rough speech. "Let's not talk about it now. Tomorrow I'll feel fine. But I'll stick by you two. You needn't

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worry about that. John Blackburn is another man who'll give that gang a fight. Now Miss Matilda is calling us to eat. Don't say anything that'll make her feel worse."

AFTER supper Washoe pulled himself into the saddle and with the girl walking at his side walked the mare around the place. There still remained considerable débris of discarded garments and old boots which had won the spot its name when John Reese first passed that way. Four miles above the Kenyon cabin was the blacksmith shop and station of Tom Pitt. To Washoe, fresh from sparkling mountain streams and lakes, the scene was depressing. The girl saw but little of the mud-flats and sloughs for thinking of her father. She looked upon him as being rather a humorous institution and yet she missed him in this strange, new land.

She would have spread her blankets on the ground had not Washoe quite savagely insisted she sleep in the wagon. She tossed some blankets from the wagon and began—

"If you make yourself worse by sleeping on the ground——"

"We three will sleep by the fire and do fine," he interrupted. But it was past midnight before he closed his eyes.

The girl was the first up, and after renewing the fire she went to Washoe and frowned uneasily as she beheld his flushed face. With a little exclamation of dismay she rested a hand on his forehead and found it burning with fever. He stirred uneasily and muttered something unintelligible. When Feeble Thomas rolled from his blankets she beckoned him to join her one side.

"He's sick!" she whispered and nodding toward Washoe. "He's sick and may die; and I'm to blame for letting him sleep on the ground. As soon as we can eat we must start back."

"Oh, Lawd! What a mess!" sighed Thomas, tugging at his beard. "If we was jumped now——"

"That's all you think of," she savagely broke in. "You two stay here, but he goes back. If I can get him to Fort Churchill the doctor will help him. If any one tries to stop me— Well, we can all die once and have it over with."

Thomas stared at her steadily for a few moments, then bowed his head and admitted:

"Why, yes. That's one way to beat any game."

He began pacing around the fire, often reversing the circle, clutching his hands behind his bowed back and unclasping them at every other step. When he ceased walking he was breathing in gasps, like a spent runner. She was too busy with the breakfast to notice him until he timidly touched her arm.

"Reckon Sorry and me will go back with you two," he mumbled. "Don't seem much else for us to do."

"Go where you will, but Mister Washoe is going to a doctor if he ain't killed by those skunks before I can get him there," she sharply retorted.

Muttering and working his hands convulsively Feeble walked around the fire for a few minutes, then aroused Kane and informed him of the girl's decision. Kane nearly collapsed, and Thomas drew him to one side so he would not disturb Washoe's uneasy slumbers.

"But, Feeble," he groaned, "he'll kill me sure. Shoot me down like a dawg. And I swear I was only looking on when they killed Joe Smith! Just by accident that I was in Carthage at all. I'll swear that on their own bible! It's bad enough to know we can't find the buried gold. But to have that bloodhound after me because a man was killed fourteen years ago! Why couldn't they have done for me way back, before I went through all this? It ain't fair."

"You ain't dead yet, Sorry," soothed Thomas. "But Moses and Hawkins is, and two of Mayfield's men. Maybe some more of them will peg out before you do. Maybe we can sneak over the ridge and lose ourselves in Californy. It's a master place to hide in."

"We can't ever make it. Not even if we swung north and went by the Truckee road. Mayfield has spies everywhere," bitterly lamented Kane. "What good if all those fellers are killed off but one, if that one keeps after me? Why can't we take Washoe in the team and strike north after that Jaimson man, who stole all my gold?"

"No, no," opposed Thomas. "Washoe is a sick man. He must have his chance."

"But what chance does he have if we meet the bloody devils and they kill him?" passionately persisted Kane.

"He must run that risk," slowly admitted Thomas. "Still they may not come. His

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only chance to live is to reach a doctor."

Washoe awoke and stared about him, then essayed to rise, only to slump back with a groan. He tried to crawl from his blankets and collapsed on his face. The girl had Kane bring him water while she arranged his bed in the wagon. After he had drunk and she had bathed his head the three of them lifted him, protesting, into the wagon. The girl then ordered the men to eat and harness the horses.

Washoe, aroused by her commands, demanded to know what she was purposing to do, but lost all interest before she had finished an evasive reply. Without eating she took her place on the seat and fiercely warned the men—

"If you're coming along with us you want to get your traps together and look smart."

Kane was incapable of helping his friend wrap up their scanty belongings. While Thomas rolled their blankets Kane wandered about, shaking with fear and repeatedly declaring he would be a dead man before night. Without waiting for them to take to horse the girl picked up the reins and whip. Before she could start the horses Kane gave a shrill scream and pointed a trembling hand down the stage-road. A cloud of dust was advancing and it moved too rapidly to be raised except by horsemen. The girl slipped over the seat and secured one of Washoe's guns. Kane, completely unnerved, threw himself on the ground and sat with bowed head. Thomas tugged spasmodically at his beard and breathed in gulps as he watched the approaching dust. Horsemen making for the east would not push their steeds like that. There were three of them, one in the lead and two abreast. And they rode as men do who see the end of their journey.

"Who be they? Who be they?" wailed Kane, not daring to lift his head.

"The man ahead is George," replied Thomas. "Stay here, and I'll go on and talk to them."

He repeated this to the girl as she appeared at the end of the wagon, the revolver held in both hands. Then he walked down the road, his head bowed, his hands clasped behind his back.

He moved slowly and yet had time to advance some two hundred feet before George recognized him. He raised a hand, and George, satisfied the game was all but ended, reined in and leaped to the ground. Bint and Gerry likewise dismounted and stared curiously at the bowed and dusty figure.

"So it's you, is it, Mr. Thomas?" greeted the killer with a queer smile.

"I come to have a little talk with you," meekly replied Thomas.

"It'll be a very little talk. Fact, it's about finished. Where's Washoe? And don't lie to me this time."

"In that wagon, sick with fever. He was shot up and ain't had proper care," muttered Thomas.

George smiled cruelly and said:

"Good news. Boys, you hear what the old rat says. Washoe killed your friends. He's helpless. You know what Mayfield expects you to do when you find young Washoe?"

"We know," gritted Bint. "And to think that girl fooled us! To think we had him and didn't know it!"

"The girl seems to be holding a gun. She has peculiar notions. Look out for her."

"We'll watch out. We want her for the game she played on us," muttered Gerry.

"Where's Kane, old man?"

"He's back there by the wagon. Sitting on the ground, a-sagging his head, a-waiting to be killed," truthfully replied Thomas.

This completed George's good humor.

"Boys, this is rich," he exulted. "Mayfield will always regret missing this. I knew he was guessing wrong when he insisted they had made for the Sierras. If he'd waited an hour longer he'd be here with us."

"Bill was always bull-headed. Never wanted to wait. Bint and me knew something was wrong with that wagon and that girl," growled Gerry. "But she won't fool us again."

"It's much better here than where you met them," said George. "We start out to catch Washoe, and catch the man I supposed had slipped out the country. It's what I call luck."

"Wait," begged Thomas in a husky voice, stretching out a hand as if to restrain the killer from advancing on the camp. "Sorry Kane is a honest man. He told me he never had nothing to do with that Carthage rumpus. I believe him. You must."

"You shouldn't make me remember how you lied to me in the Magnolia," said George as he slapped the old man's face.

"I only ask you to wait a minute," panted Thomas. "No one's trying to run away.

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If you get to believing that Sorry Kane didn't have no part nor parcel in that Carthage business then you ain't got no call to harm him."

"I'm afraid you know too much," warned George.

He perceived that Thomas was laboring under some terrific emotion. Bint and Gerry, more direct and simple in their processes of thinking, only realized that Thomas was annoying them. Bint stepped forward and buffeted the old man on the side of the head and sent him staggering. Before he could fall Gerry had corrected his disturbed balance with a blow on the other side of the head. George scarcely noted these brutalities, for now he was interested in watching the girl as she endeavored to keep Washoe from crawling out of the wagon.

Thomas swayed from side to side, his mouth forming words which his tongue did not utter.

"Wait a minute," he panted. "I've asked you to wait. Now you'd better hark to me."

George did not seem to hear him. Bint declared—

"It oughter be a clean sweep, with no one to tell what happened."

"That would be Bill's way," whined Gerry, also filled with a blood lust. "No dust in sight. No one to see us."

George strode forward like some mechanical figure, lifting his feet stiffly, his dull eyes never leaving the figure of the man now half out the end of the wagon.

Thomas' bowed figure straightened up, and a fearful change swept over his haggard countenance.

"Now, —— you, wait!" he roared; and the new quality in his voice caused George to look at him.

The killer stared in wonder at the metamorphosis of the furrowed, begrimed countenance. It was like watching a spiritless dog suddenly go mad.

"All right for this one, boys," said George.

"I've got him!" yelled Bint, releasing the devil in his vicious mind. And in frantic fury to slay ahead of Gerry he grabbed for his revolver.

With indescribable swiftness Thomas' lean hand had plucked forth an enormous forty-four caliber revolver, and as the nine-inch barrel spit fire with a deafening report Bint went down with a shattered head. This unexpected tragedy caused George and Gerry to remain motionless for a second; or long enough for Thomas once more to warn—

"Wait!"

With the howl of a madman Gerry pulled a gun. Silently, but even more quickly, George drew his two weapons. At the same moment a second huge Colt appeared in Thomas' left hand as if placed there by magic. Gerry never had a chance to pull trigger, but George managed to get in one shot as Thomas commenced shooting with both hands. The crashing detonation of the three guns, fired almost as one, sounded like a cannon in Kane's ears, while Washoe could not decide whether the spectacle was real or a piece of delirium. George began to reel as he pulled trigger; and he died standing; and before he fell he was riddled through and through.

Thomas slowly sank to a sitting posture, his legs stretched out before him, his body sagging forward. He was still clutching the big guns when Miss Matilda reached his side. He knew her step although he was dying, and without lifting his head he explained:

"I asked them to wait and talk it over. I hear Kane coming. Hurry, hurry, Sorry Kane! Be sorry no more. It's all over."

"You done for them! You done for the three of them!" screamed Kane, scarcely able to believe what his eyes were telling him. "Three dead men! Oh, my God! How did you do it!"

"You're hurt! You're badly hurt," whimpered the girl, kneeling beside him.

"Time I was dead if I can't keep from gun-fighting," Thomas muttered. "Got on my nerves, after all these years. There was Sorry, always hiding from a gunman he didn't know. And there was me, ma'am, always hiding from old Dragoon Jackson." He ceased talking long enough to draw a bubbling breath and dropped the guns in the sand before him, and continued:

"Dragoon's old guns, ma'am. Notches on 'em. Wicked old guns. They ain't spoke for years. Never would wear 'em. Didn't want to be tempted. Let every one cuff me 'round, but never yipped back. But a gun-fighter can't forget his ways if he has his guns on. Too bad Mayfield wa'n't here. Made a clean sweep then." He commenced coughing gently. Then he muttered: "Washoe. Good lad. Tell him good-by for me."

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"Thomas! Thomas! How did you do it?" sobbed Washoe, dropping beside the dying man and weakly throwing an arm around his shoulders. "I saw it! My God! Such gun-work! George never had a chance, even with two men back of him! You mustn't die. You sha'n't die!"

"Used to handle guns," faintly answered Thomas, his head sinking a notch. "Always had the knack. Devil's gift. It's sending me over the Divide. Quit using them years ago—after I'd killed the wrong man—innercent man. Never thought to use 'em again. Some things have to be done. No other way out. Bury the guns with me." He tried to twist his head to see Miss Matilda, and apologetically informed her.

"I'm Dragoon Jackson, ma'am."

And having had his say and having bared his secret, he toppled over, done with gun-fighting and fighting-men; dying, as he had so long lived, by the gun, but dying nobly and grandly to save the helpless.

## CHAPTER XII

### ALL TRAILS END

AFTER a few weeks Washoe was out on the street, none the worse for his gunshot wounds. Miss Matilda had not forgotten him during his convalescence, as was daily proven by anxious messages in unformed chirography and by many covered dishes testifying to her pleasing ability in the kitchen. Sorry Kane had been her messenger. And now he had recovered from his hurts Washoe made it his first business to visit the Sierra Seminary.

Miss Clapp was enthusiastic over the girl's rapid progress in books and music and announced a desire to fit her for teaching. Then she took pity on the young man's impatience and retired. Miss Matilda was in exuberant spirits when she entered and found her friend looking so well.

"Just a trifle washed out, Mister Washoe, but a few days in the wind and sun will make you look like an ore-team driver. Only one thing lacking to make me all happy."

"Put a name to it, young lady."

"Drat pap Jaimson! It's him—he. Book learning beginning to take. I want him to quit wandering around and dodging toll-gates. It's time we settled down. He can go to truck-farming along the river. He'll never amount to shucks as a miner. Just got a shiftless streak that only hard work can squelch."

"All right, young lady. I'll fetch him."

"Sho! Trying to be comical? That *is* a notion! Leave your work and go wandering up north to that wild country!"

"I'll arrange to get word to him," evasively replied Washoe. "I started out to put you in your father's care. Haven't finished that job yet."

"Pap needs to be put in my care," she stoutly corrected. "He doesn't feel any more responsibility than a child. But it ain't for you to go looking him up."

Before Washoe could make reply Sorry Kane shuffled in. He had elected himself man of all work for the seminary so he might be near Miss Matilda. He was overjoyed to behold Washoe, and for a minute the pathos and sorrow were missing from his gaunt visage. But as they talked the old loneliness crept back. Washoe asked about his plans, intimating the way would be made easy did he desire to leave the valley and go east, or to the coast.

"No, no," quickly refused Kane. "It's mighty kind of you, Washoe, but it wouldn't be fair to Feeble Thomas. He's buried near the old tunnel, and sometimes I go there for a few days when they can spare me from this school so's he'll know I'm still a pard of his. Just sit 'round and smoke and read from books to him. Lawd! What a man he was! No; I can't never go rampaging off among strangers. Can't leave an old pard that way. He knows I have to put in lots of time up here; but every now and then he's sorter expecting me to fetch up at the tunnel and read about that Count o' Monte Cristo cuss. Miss Clapp got me a new book with the whole story in it; and danged if it don't read exactly like the one that was stole. So, you see, Washoe, my duty's here. If it wa'n't for Feeble feeling sorter lonesome I'd go trailing after Tildy's pa and fetch him back where she can keep a eye on him. Mighty glad to see you looking so pert. Don't think Mayfield will dast ever come back here, but keep both guns on till he gits killed. Now I'll be moseying back to my chores."

Matilda showed Washoe the books she had been reading, and, at his insistence, played and sang for him. In leaving he asked her when he could call again, and

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surprize and amusement made her eyes round and wide.

"Mister Washoe, for a man that's reckoned to be sensible you can act numb at times. You drop in when you feel like it."

As he walked back to his lodgings he firmly believed he would "feel like it" on the morrow. Somehow the zest for speculating in mineral lands had left him. During his walk to his room he was asked for the price of a drink by a man who was estimated to be worth nearly a million a few weeks before. In front of the St. Nicholas he was offered sixty thousand dollars for his holdings in the Gopher Hole and promptly accepted. The purchaser, the last time Washoe saw him, had been sponging for drinks.

With his interest in speculation deadened he felt out of place. For want of something better to do he retired to his room. He was discovering that old Thomas' death was a great shock to him. The more he brooded over the fact that Thomas was the famous Texas gun-fighter, long since supposed to be dead, the more his amazement grew. Washoe remembered the old man's last words, and he wondered if he, too, were to be considered as a gun-fighter. His record was clean; but so had been Dragoon Jackson's until he erred and killed the wrong man.

"A wonderful man," he muttered. "Showed more courage when he put his guns aside than when he was wearing 'em. Virginia City is probably talking about me as being a gun-man. But I'll fool 'em. No gun-fighting for mine."

Yet he took Sorry Kane's advice and decided he would wear his two guns until he knew there was no chance for Mayfield to return. While he was resting on his bed and thinking over the rapid drama of the last few weeks Blackburn dropped in to pay his daily visit.

"Can't stop a minute, Washoe," he cried, reaching out a hand to grasp his friend's hand. "Met Sorry Kane. Said you'd just been making a call at the seminary. That's bully. Crowd at the hotel was talking about your selling your interest in the Gopher Hole. Good for you and a mighty good trade for the buyer. Now, Washoe, promise me you'll try and salt that money away and quit breaking faro banks and dealing in ledges."

"All through. That's why I sold out. Just don't have any interest. What's your hurry?"

"One of Mayfield's men is in town and I'm going to arrest him. I'm going to bag every member of that gang as fast as they show up. I've been waiting for Mayfield to come back, but George's death seems to have scared him away for good. So long. See you at supper."

After his friend had hurried away Washoe tried to read, but lacked the inclination. His mind persisted in dwelling on Sorry Kane reading aloud from the "Count o' Monte Cristo" beside the grave of Feeble Thomas. He buckled on his guns and took to the street. As he halted outside his door and breathed deep of the cold November air William M. Stewart came across the road and broke in on Washoe's meditations with a cordial greeting. After expressing congratulations for the young man's recovery, he said:

"While the boys were handing out toll franchises here last month I had them book one for you, Washoe. Looked rather dubious if you'd ever live to use it; but it's waiting for you."

"Why, that's mighty decent of you, Mr. Stewart," cried Washoe. "I was just going to search for John Blackburn and listen to him preach against my going back to the States. It was very kind of you."

"You tried to do me a good turn with that tip about the Gopher Hole," reminded Stewart. "I was suspicious at the wrong time, unfortunately. I don't know just where your franchise operates, but it should be a good one. I warned the boys to say nothing about it until you'd recovered your health."

"I'll walk along a bit with you. I'm not used to being remembered that way. You've taken the wind out of my sails completely."

A horseman, riding like mad, swept around a corner and was gone down the Dayton road. The two men halted and stared after him.

"Something must have busted loose," remarked Washoe.

"Near here, too," snapped the lawyer. "Hear it!"

Washoe heard it plainly, the wild roar of a street mob. Men began running toward them, the leader bawling—

"Which way did the dirty —— go?"

"Who was it, and what's the matter?" countered Washoe.

"Bill Mayfield! Just got back to town and killed John Blackburn!"

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Washoe staggered weakly and the lawyer's arm shot out to support him for a moment.

"The murderer rode towards Dayton," he informed the mob.

"I'm all right now," whispered Washoe. "John Blackburn killed! And by that ——! Mr. Stewart, I'm going to get that man, if I chase him into the Atlantic Ocean."

WITH that he pressed on faster than the lawyer cared to walk and was soon at the scene of the tragedy. From the excited bystanders he learned how Mayfield had murdered the deputy marshal as the latter was arresting a member of the gang. Washoe tarried only long enough to secure an outline of the affair and then went to the room where the dead man had been carried. When he emerged from the house his face was white and drawn and his eyes fixed in a steady stare. By the time he had hired a good saddle horse—for he would not wait to ride to Virginia and secure his mare—the citizens of Carson had subscribed a reward of three thousand dollars for the villain's capture. He rode in haste to Dayton, but could find no one who had seen Mayfield pass the town.

"The high valley!" Washoe muttered to himself, and changing horses he took the rough road back into the mountains. Mayfield was not there.

Still believing he would come there Washoe wasted a day and a night in waiting for him. When he returned to Dayton he learned how the clergyman, presiding at Blackburn's funeral, had exhorted the people to make every effort to run down the assassin and had volunteered to act as one of a posse. Before he could get clear of the town word was received that Mayfield had been captured and was lodged in Carson City jail.

Changing back to the horse he had hired Washoe rode post-haste to Carson, not daring to credit the news until he had seen the desperado in the stout log cabin that served as a jail. And Mayfield was there, heavily ironed, and half-mad for want of liquor. The capture of Mayfield had brought many men flocking into town, and as Washoe met them on the street and heard their bold talk he called on Governor Nye and warned him an attempt would be made to rescue the prisoner.

"I know it," said the governor. "When he was first brought in I was afraid a mob would hang him."

"Let me serve as one of the guards," requested Washoe. "At least they won't rescue him."

Permission was readily granted. When Washoe got back to the jail he found two strong factions were represented by the processions of men passing and repassing the cabin. There were those who were for hanging Mayfield off-hand, and there was the vicious element planning to effect his release, and threatening to burn the town if the mob got him. Governor Nye visited the jail during the day and twice during the night to assure himself the prisoner was in no imminent danger of being hanged by a mob, or of being released. As he left the jail he confided to Washoe:

"I've sent word to Fort Churchill for soldiers. This man shall pay the penalty in a legal manner."

In the forenoon a lieutenant and fifteen men arrived and took over the work of guarding the prisoner. Exhausted by three days of traveling and watching Washoe went to bed and slept for twenty hours. When he went out on the street he was stunned to learn that Mayfield had escaped and had ridden north. Telegraphing to Virginia City for his mare to be brought down to Dayton he took the stage for that town and commenced a search that was to carry him up the Snake River basin and across the Bitterroot Mountains.

With no attempt at haste he patiently passed from camp to camp, losing the trail for days and then picking it up. At old Fort Hall he secured definite information that Mayfield had crossed into the Beaverhead country. The man who told him this had started with Mayfield's party, but had turned back on reaching the mountains.

For the first time since the long chase began Washoe felt assured of success. He carefully prepared for the journey and succeeded in crossing to the Beaverhead River without any mishaps. He spent the night with some prospectors, who told him of a savage bully they had entertained a short time before. After listening to their description Washoe knew he was hot on the trail. At the close of the following day he left the river to ride up a little tributary where the prospectors had told him was a small camp. Before reaching the camp he could hear shouting and loud-voiced

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profanity, which seemed to be beyond the ordinary confusion of such a place.

He rode out from the woods and halted to survey the score or so of miners standing before a groggery, with the light from the windows vaguely lighting their bearded faces. He heard a shrill voice boasting:

"So yo're a man-killer be you? Well, stranger, I'm a tamer of such critters. I'm a whole team of b'ar dawgs. I can break a 'gator's neck by swingin' him by the tail. When I get dry I drink up a crick. When I get a thirst there ain't blue-ruin enough to soften it."

"Have ye done all the yappin' ye're wantin' to make?" growled a familiar voice. And Washoe slid from the saddle and ran toward the group.

"I've said 'bout all I'm goin' to. Yo' said inside yo' was going to lay me in my grave. I'm telling that yo're a black-whiskered robber and I'm going to comb yo' most 'mazing. For I'm the 'riginal exterminator from Wolf Knob. Yowee!" And the speaker leaped with remarkable agility into the air, cracked his heels together three times, crowed like a game-cock, and flapped his arms.

As Washoe pressed through the circle the men suddenly gave ground in a wild stampede. With his view unimpaired Washoe beheld Mayfield darting a hand to his belt, while his opponent straightened out in mid-air and lunged with a bowie-knife. The gun went off harmlessly. The knife remained transfixed deep in the desperado's breast. As Mayfield crashed to the ground his slayer, who had fallen on his face after delivering the mortal thrust, leaped nimbly to his feet and crowed in triumph. Then wheeling on the spectators he fiercely demanded:

"Any one here what says old man Jaimson didn't fight fair? Any one a-saying he wa'n't crowded into this fuss?"

"You're all right, Pap. The skunk got what he's been hankering for ever since he come here," shouted a spectator. And he seemed to voice the sentiments of the camp.

Washoe reached out and touched Jaimson on the shoulder. Instantly the man had pivoted about, his half-closed gray eyes staring questioningly.

"Have you a daughter named Matilda Jaimson?" asked Washoe.

"Oh, my Lawd! Don't say nothing has happened to Tildy!" groaned Jaimson. "I was just going down to find her."

"She has suffered much. You should go to her at once. You've just killed the man who stole her while you were on Reese River. I followed him here to kill him. You got ahead of me by a few minutes. It's a long ride back and the passes will soon be filled with snow. I start tomorrow. Do you go with me or stay here and loaf all winter?"

"See here, young man, that ain't no way to talk to the Jaimson tribe. Our fambly's proud as ——. If that skunk bothered Tildy I'm mighty proud to 'a' wiped him out. As for loafing, I don't know as there's a heap of winter work in Carson Valley."

"Lots of work. Road building and teaming. Your girl's too young to be left alone there. One while she was singing songs to drunken miners so as to make a living."

"She oughter remembered she was a Jaimson. All I've been doing all these years was to drive a wagon. Road-building ain't for white folks."

"Do as you please. I don't think you'd be much of a loss the way you've left the girl to shift for herself. I start in the morning."

"You needn't get obstrepous with me," sullenly replied Jaimson. "I s'posed she was living on the fat of the land with her Uncle Allen till two men met me near the sink of the Carson and give me the news. If I was sure of honest work I'd start back tomorrer. This country ain't much fitter for a white man than Reese River."

Washoe eyed him gloomily.

"There's other kinds of work. I can give you a job very soon."

"You can? What sort of work?" This suspiciously.

"Minding a toll-gate."

Jaimson's face drew down in savage lines for half a minute, then crinkled with a grin.

"Toll-gate," he mused. "From what I've seen I'd say it's a mighty fine business. I'm hired. Come to my shack for a bite and a shake-down and we'll start early."

As they walked up the creek to a small hut Washoe asked—

"Just why did you kill that man?"

"For 'sulting the United States Gov'ment. He 'lowed any man what fights for the Gov'ment oughter be kilt, and he 'lowed his job was a-killing of 'em. Being a strong Gov'ment man I had to take it up. Seemed to be a ugly sort of critter, but the Jaimsons have tamed lots worse."

THE END

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# The Outlaw

by

## Will MacMahon

HE WAS the largest pup in the litter and his parents were the tallest and strongest specimens of the malemiut breed in a canine-infested Alaska Indian settlement. It was the Spring of 1918, otherwise this roly-poly, playful creature might have matured along expected lines into a typical, half-fed, toiling sledge animal.

But, the time being what it was, the United States War Department had detailed a signal corps sergeant and a buck private to take control of the telegraph office at this isolated point. The assumption was not that the goose-stepping enemy might detour via the North Pole, cleverly disguised as string-haltered caribou; the departmental intention merely was to maintain communication by wire and wireless with the Far-Northern posts of our Canadian associates in the Great War.

The doughboy bought the three months' old malemiut, and he was an individual peculiarly fitted to own that kind of a dog.

The slim, young sergeant was expert on Morse land line and Continental code wireless work, and he quickly became adept at manipulating the frying-pan and the coffee pot when he discovered what had been wished on him as a cook. The tall, lank buck private was willing to prepare food; moreover, he was eager so to do, but apparently had taken a sweetly solemn and deeply religious if not fanatic vow never to wash his hands before he cooked—or after.

Wherefore the telegrapher did kitchen police duty for himself and carefully avoided issuing any order that would require his subordinate to touch flour sack, bacon wrapper or bean pot. He even excused him from stripping the khaki jackets from the raw potatoes.

The doughboy, who was a keen hunter and a crack shot, kept the larder supplied with caribou meat and lesser game. When he entered the station, after cutting up one of the victims, his hands would be frankly crimson.

"Your bed ain't been made up, sir," he might suggest engagingly.

"Never mind; thanks!" the telegrapher would hurriedly answer. "Just run along and play with the pup."

Therefore, the small malemiut favored his master and neglected the sergeant, even as all huskies prefer their Indian or Eskimau owners to the alien white men who sully themselves with soap. When a dog's chief faculty is that of scent it is a boon to him that friend can be distinguished from foe by one sniff of the tainted air. The doughboy's purchase never had to test the wind more than once to identify his owner.

The pup's name was "Pincher," in compliment to the needle-like milk teeth with which he delighted to seize a grimy hand. At this stage he was a composite caricature of bear and wolf and fox, being all clumsy feet and bushy tail and inquisitive nose.

"I aim to make a rip-tearin' fighter of this here young dog," the proud possessor confided to the signal corps man, "an' take him back to the States when this here war is over, to make a clean-up with him in the



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pit; he's gonna have some considerable teeth."

"Wrong breed," the operator explained learnedly. "You need a dog that'll take hold and shake. These Athabaskan huskies merely slash. A pit-bred terrier would work for the throat and strangle any one of 'em. That's been demonstrated time and again."

"Uh, huh!" the doughboy remarked, calmly. "Then I'll learn this here Pinch to take hold and shake. Once, my folks gimme a woolly Noofounlan' pup when I wanted a greyhoun'. My brother 'd hold him while I beat it a piece-a-ways an' called him or vicky versus, an' when—"

"Or what?"

"Vicky versus—turn about—the other way round. First, I'd run, an' then my brother 'd run with the mutt peltin' along after us."

"Oh, I see!"

"Uh, huh! An' when that there Noofounlan' dog was eighteen months old he could travel so fast it was plumb suicide for a rabbit to show off."

Thereafter, Pincher was frequently encouraged by his patient trainer to seize a large bundle of rags fashioned roughly in the outline of a dog. He soon learned to hold and shake, and when a year old would leap high up against the wall of his master's bunk room and cling snarlingly to a piece of rope fastened there.

The dog grew surprizingly large and strong, not having to undergo the hardships of his fellow malemiuts—the consuming frost of fifty degrees below zero out-of-doors and the wasting numbness of sleeping in the drifted snow, and the debilitating lack of any food but dried fish. At night the doughboy bedded him down indoors on cast-off wool clothing and in the daytime gave him meat and drink to repletion.

Pincher played at pulling a light sledge to and from the hunting grounds in the near-by hills and chased in deadly earnest the snow-shoe hares that relied more on speed than their natural camouflage in a white drift. The soldier also wrestled mightily with his four-footed chum in the station yard itself until their realistic yells and snarls made the sergeant apprehensive.

"Come away from that man!" he would call out, insultingly. "You'll get a flea on you, Pinch!"

The dog was fourteen months old when he had his first fight, an impromptu affair with a smaller but older malemiut that brazenly approached the bunk house door where a stew of caribou was cooling to the temperature safe for a pet to wolf it down. Pincher laid hold on top of the stranger's neck and shook him limp inside of five minutes.

At that point the interloper looked all right; a casual observer might have said that the animal lay sleeping—but he was quite dead.

"I guess this here Indian mutt got himself a broken neck," the doughboy surmised, not regretfully. "I sure wish this here War was over so I could make me some real money with my pup a-fightin' them there fightin' dogs down in the good old U. S. A."

Thereafter, the soldier began to invent dog-fighting opportunities in the settlement. If no malemiut voluntarily rushed from a hut-yard in challenge, the villain in khaki would innocently look away and growl just loud enough for the native owner not to hear.

The doughboy carried a bottle of ammonia for emergencies, but, being partisan, managed nearly to stifle the other dog before giving Pincher a snoutful of the suffocating fumes and the gentle command: "I guess you better let a-loose of him now, pup!"

It was not long before the quarrelsome malemiuts of the Athabaskans decided unanimously that this white man's dog was bad medicine. He did not play their time-honored game of slash and slash, turn and turn about, now-you-now-me and "vicky versus," but instead made a business-like, single-thoughted battle that won for him every time. His method of holding on was as unwelcome to a husky as would be the boa constrictor procedure of a wrestler in a street fight with a pugilist.

The Athabaskans themselves cannily began to encourage the committing of mayhem on their reluctant dogs. The time should come when the huge, dark-coated, long-fanged warrior would be the sire of puppies destined to grow as formidable as he, and the brown-skinned, slant-eyed hunters and trappers intended to own such of them as could be bought, begged or stolen.

The doughboy understood the propaganda concealed in the sudden appearance of a husky, kicked out of a hut directly in

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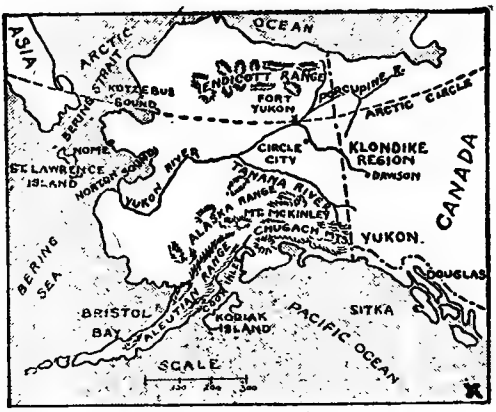


Pincher's path. If the unfortunate brute did not make a thoroughly valiant fight against overwhelming odds, the Indian soon would come out and re-kick his dog homeward.

"Him no good bachelor!" he would announce, significantly.

"Pinch, him too young for married!" the doughboy might explain. "When older him catchum wife."

"Me, I giveum plenty much fur for catchum one dog pup," the Athabaskan would bargain.

SO THE soldier and his pet trod the settlement trails like conquering heroes. Two-legged onlookers envied the owner and the four-footed spectators avoided the black fury that accompanied him.

The doughboy retrieved from a childhood memory a belligerent recital that he never before had felt capable of giving publicly. Now, he bellowed, discordantly, to the universe:

"For the man was on his muscle,
And the dog was on the bite;
To injure man or beast
Was sure to start a fight!"

Only the completely cowed malemiuts could hear that loud, unmusical challenge, with the chorus of Pincher's deep barking, and refrain from rushing forth. Those that forgot a previous shaking, at once fell heir to another painful experience—and the pitiless sting of ammonia.

The triumph of mind over matter was at this satisfactory height when a ten-dog sledge glided into the settlement one noon on the way northward to the gold diggings. An Indian on snow-shoes was trail breaker for the outfit, and a white man in costly furs loafed behind at the gee-pole. The freight consisted of two large hampers swathed in blankets.

The buck private and his dog sallied out from the station to appraise the newcomers. Pincher, as befitted the local champion, walked with stiff-legged significance, and the strange huskies swiftly assumed a mass formation to repel attack. The black malemiut, thereupon, growled a general challenge.

An answering roar, terrific, menacing, came from one of the crates and a high, piercing snarl from the other.

"Howdy, mister!" the doughboy made salutation. "What you got; circus animals?"

"Howdy, general!" the white man replied. "No; I got two fighting dogs. Going up to the mines for a match. Has that animal of yours ever had a turn-up?"

"Who? This here pup? You mean has he ever had a fight? No; he's only a little old sledge dog; wouldn't hurt a flea!" the "general" answered, modestly.

"Well, keep him out of reach," the traveler advised, genially. "I'm going to give Tiger a walk on the leash. That's Crazy Kate in the other coop. She weighs only twenty-five, but here's a fifty-pounder that can stop any dog or wolf in Alaska for any amount of my money."

He opened the door of a hamper and snapped on a leash, and a long, low, brindle brute bounded out. His turtle-shaped head and whip-like tail were held high and for a few moments he posed with front and hind legs stretched obliquely fore and aft like the stance of a hackney stallion.

"How much does he get for a fight?" the doughboy inquired, speculatively.

"Thousand dollar purse and any side bet that I can get down," the dog-pitter answered, good humoredly. "Why, do you want to give your mutt a toss in?"

"I mebbe can scrape up three hundred dollars," the soldier ventured, apologetically.

"You're on!" was the quick verdict. "But that wouldn't pay Tige for a finish fight; I'll make it a sporting proposition—an even three hundred your dog yells to be taken out within ten minutes after being tossed in. There's a bargain for you! Find a cleared spot while I exercise Tiger; he's had a long ride."

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The doughboy chose the station yard for an arena, and his natural misgivings were augmented by the sergeant's pessimistic prophecies.

"That heavyweight terrier 'll shut off Pinch's breath and maybe break his spirit entirely, at the worst," he declared. "And you've made a fool bet; you know a malemiut hollers bloody murder when another dog gets a good hold. You'd better renig!"

"Nope!" the doughboy decided. "If this here trained shaker of mine is any part yellow it's worth three hundred bones for me to find it out right now."

The Athabaskans of the settlement, scenting battle and a gamble, too, came in a noisy drove to the station fence. They were laden with raw pelts and eager to place them on Pincher's chances.

"He catchum short-haired dog one time," their spokesman announced, confidently. "One time catchum, one time killum!"

The Indian trail breaker for the fighting animals covered the natives' bets with money—at the open handed ratio of one hundred cents to about twenty dollars' worth of fur.

When the dog-pitter brought his terrier into the cleared spot he nodded pleasantly to the Signal Corps man.

"Howdy, sergeant," he said. "Can I give some of my bankroll a little play with you? I'll lay two to one on this brindle."

"I wasn't born yesterday!" the operator replied, darkly. "I know a pit dog when I see one. But, howdy, just the same, mister! It isn't your fault; I've warned my sourdough friend to back out!"

"It ain't a finish turn-up," the stranger explained, professionally. "Take off your dog's collar, soldier boy!"

"All right, but what for you got that there wagon spoke in your hand?" the doughboy demanded, suspiciously.

"To pry open Tiger's jaws after your dog yells 'uncle!' "

"Oh-h-h-h, just like that!" was the soldier boy's pained murmur.

The sergeant snickered annoyingly.

"Blooey!" he announced. "*Bang* goes the buck private's good three hundred. I bet you wish you hadn't raised your pup to be a fighter!"

By now, the rival warriors were in opposite corners of the smooth, hard, white twenty foot square. The terrier stood silent, but watchful.

The malemiut was a-swirl with energy. Boastfully growling, he faced the enemy and dared him to his teeth, and the next instant turned clear around for the express purpose of swearing at him over the shoulder.

"Ready here!" the dog-pitter announced. "Watch the time on your wrist; I'll call off the minutes and you can compare."

The doughboy glanced at his watch, but it is doubtful whether he saw the hands. Later, he discovered that the time-piece was not wound at all.

"Go on; cut loose!" he remarked nervously.

The brindle, favored by a running start, dashed clear across the "pit." His jaws clashed in the air exactly where Pincher's throat had been the fraction of a second before.

The huge black dog was then a yard off the ground in a bucking leap. As he came down he whirled like a wolf, seized the side of Tiger's neck and began to shake powerfully.

The doughboy automatically fumbled in his jacket pocket for the bottle of ammonia.

"A hundred even that Tige breaks the hold in two minutes!" his owner called out banteringly.

"Slip me the money!" the doughboy appealed to the Signal Corps man.

"No!" that conservative demurred, firmly. "Look at the terrier; he likes that rough-housing."

Pincher was dusting the snowy particles of the pit floor with the smooth-coated fellow. Tiger did not whimper and when he could gain footing for a few moments his ratty tail wagged gleefully.

At the end of five minutes the professional pitter made a crafty suggestion. He saw that this big malemiut was strangely unlike its breed in fighting tactics.

"Your dog can't hurt mine with that shallow hold," he explained. "It's a poor fight; let's break 'em out for another 'scratch.' "

He meant by "scratch" to take the battlers to their corners and start them afresh.

"Nope; my pup hain't got a scratch on him an' he only has five minutes to go!" the doughboy objected, sagely.

He looked at his ammonia bottle and plainly saw minute and second hands on it.

"I'll take that hundred now that Pinch 'll hold another two minutes!" the operator shouted, finally surrendering to the savage



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thrill of the scene and the snarling, muffled sing-song of the malemiut.

"That bet is ancient history!" the pitter replied, sarcastically. "I'd be throwing good money after bad. I don't understand this kind of a——"

"I lose!" he suddenly exclaimed, interrupting his own thoughts on Pincher's prowess. "I'll take my dog out!"

The snow all about the threshing, thumping struggle abruptly had become spotted with carmine. It was as if some one unseen were lavishly using a sprinkling can containing red ink.

The Indian hunters and trappers, with an instinct that outread the visible evidence of the short-haired dog's torture, began to shout joyfully.

"Me catchum heap money, buyum heap flour!" they yelled. "Me catchum heap blanket! Me catchum heap bacon!"

The pitter had jumped forward with the wheel spoke and swiftly pried open Pincher's jaws, and the doughboy dragged back his raging champion.

"Hush, you Pinch!" he commanded, exultingly. "You're yellin', but you ain't sayin', 'uncle'! Dry up or I'll give you a dose from this here bottle! Oh, no, I won't! From now on every time you fight, you're gonna kill!"

The doomed terrier was now lying prostrate on the snow. Crimson spurts from his torn neck were more than sprinkling the arena.

"Up, boy!" his owner ordered, sharply.

Tiger gamely tried to stand, but soon sank to a crouching attitude. His tail quivered into limpness.

"Speak, Tige!" the pitter pleaded.

The stricken animal, drawing on the courage that had descended unsullied to him through a thousand stoical sires and dams, raised his head and growled. Then he choked once, as if on a bone, stretched out slowly on his side, and was dead.

"Never a whimper!" his master said, proudly. "He's killed a dozen dogs by cutting the jugular vein, and he knew before I did that your animal was eating him right down to the spot. But you told me the big fellow never had a turn up?"

"You don't call this here a fight, do you?" the buck private demanded, vaingloriously. "Well, that's what happens every time this here pup grabs himself a mouthful. He makes 'em say, 'uncle' or slaughters 'em. It ain't no duel; it's a firin' squad!"

"Hey, where is he?" the shrinking violet continued, excitedly. "Here, Pinch! Here, Pinch——"

Search revealed the huge malemiut cavorting around the hamper containing Crazy Kate. She was discouraging his diffident overtures with snarling leaps against the sides of her prison.

"Would that little one fight a he-dog?" the soldier inquired, speculatively.

"Yes; but I won't match her an ounce over her weight," the owner replied, pointedly.

He put the slain Tiger back in the hamper, and the dog-team broke out the sledge on its journey to the gold country.

"I'll bury him where the huskies and the wolves can't dig," he added. "Don't press your luck too hard, soldier boy; I've an idea that big dog will quit the first time he gets hurt."

The soldier boy grinned exultingly.

"Bet you I make a million dollars on this here fightin' pup!" he yelled after the lurching sledge.

"An' don't you try to steal him, neither!" he continued, but by then the fur-clad dog-pitter was beyond ear-shot.

For the ensuing hour the doughboy groomed his dog, brushing the thick pelt and massaging the powerful muscles. He then volunteered to make—with the same unblemished hands—a batch of sourdough for the operator's weekly baking.

"You ain't never give me a chanst at the bread, sir," he complained gently. "I sure feel that I could turn out some good light stuff today."

"It might be light," his superior conceded, judicially, "but I'm afraid it wouldn't be white!"

The frustrated one agreed without rancor.

"Fierce how the Gov'ment slips over cornmeal substitute on us," he said. "No cook can get a good color with that there stuff! I'll say that war is what Gen'ral Sherman said he'd say it was."

Next he gave audience to a score of forethoughted Athabaskans, who improved an amiable opportunity to win pledges for the future.

"Mebbe catchum dog pup," their leader explained, handing over a prime Beaver pelt. "Mebbe you keepum fur."

Others deposited as claim fees the skins

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of marten and fisher and fox until the soldier's bunk room looked like an annex to an annual fur auction sale. Suitably impressed with Pincher's importance, both as present fighter and future sire, the doughboy tied him up.

"You ain't gonna risk your million dollar jug'lar vein among these here village mutts no more," he informed the crestfallen dog. "Lie down there, pup! I'm goin' into the station to kid the sarge about not bettin' on you. I wonder if he thought he was a-gettin' my goat?"

Five minutes after his uplifted owner had disappeared into the telegraph office Pincher bit through the rope leash, shouldered open the rickety fastening of the door and glided out through the back yard. He did not exactly sneak away, but was careful not to come within the purview of the station windows. Then he made an unnecessarily wide detour through the outskirts of the settlement until he struck the trail of the sledge carrying the interesting Crazy Kate. He followed it, not in the lope of the wolf but with the gallop of the dog, which is a much faster gait.

When Pincher overtook the procession, twenty miles out, he kept a cautious distance behind, alongside, or ahead, as the mood influenced him. The white man in furs and the blanket Indian snowshoe runner were friendly in their calls and whistling, and he disdained the dog-team—but bashfulness assailed him when he viewed the hamper enclosing that scornful lady terrier.

A quarter-mile ahead on the white plain a lithe, gray animal leaped from its snowy sleeping form and loped across the trail. The sledge dogs by their uneasiness proclaimed the proximity of wolf.

Pincher, showing off like a school-boy, sped away on a short cut and overtook the fleeing wild thing within half a mile. He was not content with this grand-stand burst of speed, but dashed far beyond the gray brute. Then he returned and made dizzy circles around it.

The wolf, a year-old female, did not appear much alarmed, but kept her fangs ready to strike. When the huge, black dog abruptly ceased from a pretended attack and rushed away to refollow the sledge, she curiously sniffed at his tracks in the snow. After standing at gaze until the cavalcade of tame things disappeared over the dim, flat horizon, the she-wolf began to drift in the same direction.

"This mutt," the dog-pitter remarked to the Indian, "isn't a wolf-killer, that's certain."

"He no kill squaw-wolf in Spring," the trail breaker informed him. "Me catch big dog; him make fine team leader. You no catch him for fighter?"

"No; we don't want him for the pit or the trace, either. He's yellow. He'll quit. No good!"

"Me see him fight much. Me see him run much fast."

"Forget it! That soldier would follow us to the North Pole. After supper I'll tie a tin-can to the mutt's tail and send him home quicker than he came away."

Just then the sledge passed within sight of an Indian settlement partly hidden in snow drifts, and from an underground retreat a half-grown husky noisily emerged. Pincher was loitering behind on the trail and the pup conscientiously chased him to within a hundred feet of the dog-team.

The big, black fellow had fled with tail down, frankly in fear of being nipped. He knew that the small, obstreperous one was within his rights against an interloper. To punish the pup would invite the implacable mob vengeance of all the grown dogs of the village.

"I said this cur was yellow!" the dog-pitter declared. "Stop here and I'll let Kate show him up!"

He took out the high-strung, shivering lightweight fighter and held her muffled in his arms until Pincher diffidently circled inside of striking distance. Then the terrier was launched like a diver from a spring-board.

The malemiut did not attempt to dodge, and she skilfully pinned him by his tender nose. It was his first introduction to the oft-proven fact that Kipling was right.

"The female of the species is more deadly than the male."

Pincher had no impulse to oppose the termagant, but he told his audience and the Alaskan landscape for miles around just how agonized were his feelings. He yelped and howled and grunted and groaned in pain, but Crazy Kate was merciless. The Indian had to strive mightily with whip and voice to prevent the sledge dogs from breaking traces to join in what sounded like a killing.

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A score of gaunt huskies streamed out of the nearby settlement and drew up, an expectant, silent, tongue-lolling group, a stone's throw from the sledge. The presence of the men told them that this was an exclusive fight, not a free-for-all, but the watchful, half-starved brutes had visions of dog-meat to vary their eternal fish diet.

"And to think that this big coward finished my Tiger with a chance hold!" the dog-pitter observed, bitterly.

When he finally relented and pried apart the small terrier's jaws, Pincher sat disconsolately in the snow, snorting with grief over the shrew's petulance.

"Hike out of here, you cur! Go home!" the white man commanded, and in his disgust brought down the wagon spoke with a full-arm swing on to the malemiut's head.

The big dog collapsed as if shot.

The onlooking huskies edged forward, and suddenly paused.

Pincher bounced erect and shook himself as if coming out of water. His eyes were a red flare, and he began to gather himself tensely.

For the moment his attention was centered murderously on the snapping, snarling, tangled dog-team.

The fur-clad man moved uneasily.

The malemiut leaped in at him and struck upward, wolf-fashion, slashing wrist and shoulder and cheek in three savage tries for the throat. Then he dashed away, howling the hunting cry, into the snowy waste. The huskies streaked for home, frantic to escape any overflow of punishment for that strange dog's breaking of the Man Law.

"Shoot him!" the dog-pitter shouted. "He's turned mad!"

By the time the Indian unstrapped the rifle from the sledge the black dog was beyond range and had settled down to a silent lope.

That cruel blow on the head had been the first dealt him by man, and it disrupted the harmony of his memory cells. His training as a sledge dog, to "Gee" and "Haw" and to "Mush," and the fighting lessons of seizing and shaking, and all the happy-go-lucky education of his puppyhood, were erased as when a wet sponge cleans a chalky slate.

Into their place surged a flood of the ancient impulses and instincts of the wolf blood with which the malemiut is strongly imbued. He ran now not on the traveled back trail but at a discreet distance from it.

And here he again encountered the she-wolf. This time he did not yield to the temptation to run rings around her. Instead, he dropped flat and waited with stony indifference while she shyly made slow circles about him.

When he at last deigned to notice her presence she stood fairly nose to nose with him. He snarled masterfully in warning that no further injury should be done to his sensitive muzzle. The smooth-coated female that betrayed his trustfulness would have died now if he had her throat within seizing distance.

The shaggy gray one gently touched his nose with her cool tongue.

Then, side by side, they drifted away in the silvery dusk toward the unbroken wilderness.

THE doughboy was out at dawn on his snow-shoes, and he carried an Army rifle and a shooting grievance against the dog-pitter. He followed the Northern trail at twice the speed of an Indian, but with three times the exertion, and when he reached the spot where Crazy Kate had exemplified a great truth he was quite content to pause and puzzle out the story printed on the snow.

Here were the huge foot-prints of Pincher, winding uncertainly in and out to where the sledge had stood. There also were the dainty marks made by the paws of the terrier dancing on hind legs—with no indication to the doughboy that she had his pet by the nose.

The dog-pitter's backward, scraping steps plentifully decorated with blood were a mystery to the soldier until he saw where the malemiut went away in great leaps.

"The poor dub tried to kidnap my pup!" the soldier said to himself, exultingly. "That's about as easy as gettin' the double-Nelson hold on a grizzly!"

He followed on his dog's tracks, confident now of overtaking him—perhaps lying up beside freshly-slain wild game. He was sure that no Athabaskan along the trail, no matter how lavish with dried fish, could persuade the dog to remain away from home.

When the doughboy struck the straight-away double track—with the compact foot-prints of the she-wolf a third the size of her companion's paw-marks—he was inclined to criticize a philandering truant.

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"Doggone you, Pinch!" he muttered. "Don't you know it's plumb dangerous to be a-runnin' after these here wild women?"

Then he began a steady, grinding pursuit, grimly determined to rescue his unsophisticated pet from the wiles of this untamed vampire.

The trail went eastward several miles toward the foot-hills and here the tracks explained that Pincher had stopped, stood in indecision and then set out on a wide semi-circle to the northwest. The she-wolf had sulked behind a fallen tree, watching his departure. The mask of her long, narrow lower jaw was plain where she had rested it on the powdery snow on the trunk. Then she had followed him at her best speed, running wide of his track.

The trail again became double and so continued to within a mile of an Indian village that was half-buried in drifts. Here the dog had slowly gone ahead. Nearing the settlement, he crept—brushing the snow with his deep chest.

Where he had ceased crawling, the surface was only slightly disturbed but much blood-stained.

Boldly leading from the village were the loose, sprawling foot-prints of a husky pup—and they ended here with no back trail. The departing tracks of the grown malemiut showed that he had merely trotted.

"Now, lemme get this here clue," the soldier-detective murmured. "The Indian pup runs out an' don't never run back!

"Then what?" he demanded of himself as might any baffled sleuth. "Where's the corpse?"

A mile onward Pincher's trot converged to the she-wolf's lope, and here the mystery was solved.

"Dog eat dog!" the astounded doughboy exclaimed. "He carried the mutt in his mouth to share it with his mate. She's made a cannibal out of him already. I'll shoot her sure, now!"

HE COULD not know that Pincher, reverted to the wolf type, had of his own volition combined profit with revenge in slaying the young husky that chased him through the village.

Thereafter, the trail once more was double and went away so fast and far into rough country that the soldier became snow-shoe sore and desisted from the chase.

"Pinch mebbe 'll be home when I get there," he mused, hopefully. "He ain't gonna enlist in no wolf army an' fight for nothin' when there's real money a-waitin' us back in the U. S. A. An' there's all them furs the Indians give me for pups. Doggone you, Pinch, I'm liable to give you your first lickin' for this here A. W. O. L.!"

But the great, dark malemiut did not return from the wilderness to satisfy a buck private's nice ambition of winning a million dollars at the gentle art of dog-pitting.

The she-wolf had caught him in his rebound from the Man Law and welded him to the free life of den and chase. By the time the pack foregathered to ballot with fangs for a new leader, the renegade dog was as wild in thought and act as any grisly, gray beast among them. And when next the wolves bayed the hunting cry a black fury headed them, outpacing his wilderness brothers, making the kill alone and slaking his blood-thirst before they reached him.

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# Shipwrecked

## by Frederick Moore

*Author of "Fool's Luck," "The Butterfly," etc.*

THE monsoon was humming in the palms and rattling the nipa thatch of the bungalow when, just before midnight, Kelsey, looking to seaward into the blackness from the end of his porch, discovered the red port light of a schooner just beyond Finger Reef. The reef stood out below, marked by the phosphorescence of its line of breakers. Nearer at hand, the faint white of the surf-line on the shore traced the border of the wholly invisible sea.

Since dark, Kelsey, the only white man on the island, had been listening to the dull booming of gongs in the hills behind him. Datto Dammang and his tribesmen were on the war-path, and expecting an attack by Datto Killah, chief of a tribe on the near-by Subang Island.

Killah and his men, it was known, were preparing to come over in proas; and Dammang's wild warriors were on the alert for the enemy, whose hostile fleet would approach from the direction the schooner was now coming. Evidently the savage watchers had also sighted the lights of the schooner, for suddenly the notes of the warning gongs took a higher pitch.

Kelsey was agent for a trading-company in Manila. He knew the red light to be aboard the company's schooner *Thetis*, bound past his island for Singapore. He and Captain Randall of the *Thetis* were friends, but Randall was not expected to stop at the island this trip down. Yet from the direction and course of the schooner's side-light, she was standing in for the island; and unless she altered her helm, was in danger of going ashore on the reef.

Kelsey felt along the upper board of the porch-rail till his fingers came to a deep notch cut in the wood. He dropped on his slippered heels and put his face against a bamboo post. Now the bobbing red light of the schooner was visible in the notch.

He watched her several minutes; and, finding that she was on a line that would bring her ashore, he ran inside the bungalow and lighted a lantern. He was in white silk pajamas, and about his waist there was strapped a heavily loaded cartridge belt with a pair of revolvers.

He threw a coat over the lantern and took it out on the porch. There he exposed the lantern for several minutes, and then covered it. Next he exposed the light twice, and covered it again. He dropped down behind the notch and watched the red light—which began to describe a small arc, away from the land.

A moment, and a green starboard light appeared with the red, then the green alone. Kelsey knew that Captain Randall—or whoever was on watch on the schooner—had seen the lantern, and had hauled out to sea some two points in response to the signal.

By now the booming of the gongs had become more insistent. From an inland valley the barbaric throbbing came to Kelsey's ears over the tops of the jungles that covered the hillsides of the island. He paced the porch fretfully, keeping watch on the green light of the *Thetis*. She would

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near the reef now, he knew; but not by any great margin of safety.

Beyond the end of the reef there was a long sand shoal running out from the reef's point. The shoal did not break except in very stormy weather, but it was a place to be avoided by any schooner that had cargo, even at high water. And from the porch on which Kelsey was watching he could estimate roughly where the *Thetis* would cross the shoal if she held on the course she was steering.

"It all depends on what her draft is," he murmured. "If she strikes on that shoal, those devils in the hills will be down on her in the morning like a pack of wolves."

He exposed the lantern again, this time for more than five minutes, after which he covered it once more with the jacket.

"Before long," he added, "the *Thetis* will have the end of the reef abeam."

The schooner held on, her starboard light throwing a wavering green track across the swells when she heeled under the quartering breeze which was driving her. And just as she was off the reef's end Kelsey saw that green light give a sudden lurch upward, swing away in a quick unnatural movement, and disappear. He knew what it meant: The *Thetis* had struck on the shoal, and the seas had swung her head violently outward!

His ears caught the sharp snapping of stays, and then the crash of a mast as it broke and carried away with gaff, sail and boom.

"Driven smack on the shoal!" he cried.

He ran from the porch into the bungalow with his lantern, pulled on his shoes without stopping to lace them, slipped an extra revolver into the upper pocket of his pajama-jacket, and dashed down the path in front of his house. He carried his lantern; and, swinging at his side, it threw his shadow on the jungle in gigantic grotesque shapes.

As he ran he heard the dull report of a bursting rocket, and saw, over the tops of the dense foliage which hemmed him in, a red ball of fire with a luminous tail floating in the blackness of the overcast sky.

The detonation of the rocket was echoing in the hills of the island, and the throbbing gongs hushed. Presently there came from the higher jungles a succession of wild howls, and then the gongs renewed their booming with added frenzy, and mingled with the yelling of the savages.

"They know it's a wreck!" said Kelsey. "That means Dammang's men will be aboard the *Thetis* at daylight!"

He hastened on down the hill till he came to the sand of the beach at the rim of the jungle. Then he turned off to the left, making for the shore-end of Finger Reef. The reef made a lee, and Kelsey knew Captain Randall would want something to guide him in getting ashore in smooth water with the boats.

Still running, Kelsey heard orders being bawled out aboard the *Thetis*, the thumping of blocks and booms, the hacking of a hatchet at rigging, and the scream of sheaves as cut halyards raced through them. Sails were slatting and ripping in the wind, and the native crew were yelling in high-piping voices.

Another rocket swished upward. In the flare of its light as the driving charge sent it aloft from the vessel, Kelsey had a glimpse of the schooner. He saw that she lay broached-to, only a few yards beyond the rocky point of the reef, and she had made a new spot of white breakers where she lay on the shoal. He heard Captain Randall profanely ordering the boats to be got clear, and the low roar of Turnkell, the mate, demanding that something be "cut, and cut quick, blast your eyes!"

Kelsey did not go to the actual shore end of the reef, but stopped before he reached it. There he swung his lantern briskly.

"That you, Kelsey?" bawled Captain Randall above the boom of the surf on the reef.

"Yes! I'm to leeward of the Finger! Make for my light!"

"She's piled up for keeps," answered Randall. "Rotten compass!"

Then the skipper gave orders to Turnkell to launch a boat and get away with part of the crew. Before long Kelsey heard the thumping of oars in thole-pins, and knew that the mate was rowing for the lantern ashore.

"Lost anybody, captain?" cried Kelsey.

"No. Foremast carried away when she struck—all canvas down now—like a kettle of eels under my feet—broadside to the swells, and her seams forward are sprung open like a blooming swamp lily in the middle of July on a Maine farm!"

"You'd better get ashore without delay—and bring your guns! Natives on the war-path and raising hob!" yelled Kelsey.

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"Sure I'm coming ashore," replied Randall. "Think I'm running a swimming-beach?"

And he bawled orders for all hands to get ready to abandon the wreck.

Turnkell's boat was approaching the shore in the slack water in the lee of the reef. Kelsey held up the lantern, and in a few minutes its beams fell upon the bows of the advancing boat.

"She struck just as I was turnin' out of my bunk to relieve the skipper," cried Turnkell. "Knocked me flat—like to broke my hip—and she'll be a tee-total loss—we won't save a stick of her!"

The boat beached almost at Kelsey's feet, and Turnkell, his arms full of clothes and various belongings which he had hastily saved, jumped out of the stern into the knee-deep water. His cotton trousers were rolled up, and he wore an undershirt. He waded to the sand and stood blinking at the lantern, his heavy, loutish face puzzled by the clamor in the hills.

"What all's goin' on up there?" he asked.

"Dammang's men are ready for war," said Kelsey. "And they've seen Randall's rockets. We'll have to get out of here, quick, soon as the skipper and the rest of the crew get ashore."

"War!" exclaimed Turnkell. "That's a nice thing to git wrecked into!"

And his face revealed his fresh terror.

The Filipino seamen, having pulled the boat up on the sand, now stood about just outside the rim of the lantern light, whispering among themselves in dread alarm of the threatening notes of the distant gongs.

"Here comes the skipper's dingey," said Kelsey, and they stood and waited till Randall's boat grated on the shingle.

He jumped out, bags in each hand, and came splashing ashore. He was a tall and powerfully built man, clad in a cotton singlet open at the neck and dungaree trousers which were wet and clung tightly about his legs. The lantern revealed his bronzed, raw-boned face and black mustache.

"All off!" he exclaimed as he shook hands with Kelsey. "She's got six feet of water in her holds—couldn't drag her off that bar with all the wrecking-tugs in Manila. What the —— do those gongs mean?"

"We'd better hustle out of here," said Kelsey. "Dammang's men are on the loose—expecting Killah's warriors to come over from Subang—been going on for months now. That's what stopped our trade here. These black boys will be down soon to strip the wreck. Wish you hadn't sent up those rockets."

The Filipino crew were thoroughly frightened by now. Randall gave a few curt orders; the second boat was pulled up; and all hands hurried along the beach to pick up the path which led to Kelsey's bungalow on the heights above.

After they had found it, Kelsey gave the lantern to Turnkell and sent him on, while Randall and Kelsey followed, talking cautiously between themselves.

WHEN they reached the bungalow, Turnkell was sitting on the steps, complaining about his bruised hip and the ill luck of the wreck. The Filipinos were sent round to the shelter at the back of the house—really a wide and rambling porch where the cook slept and worked—and were told to stick close and keep quiet.

Kelsey led the way into the dark bungalow, and his Filipino cook was routed out to make coffee and provide food for the crew.

"Cargo in the *Thetis?*" asked Kelsey.

"Yes," said Randall. "Lot of old Springfield rifles, worse luck. Was taking 'em to Singapore to sell for junk metal to the Chinese. There'll be a —— of a row about this for me; the company gave bond that the old guns wouldn't be landed in any Philippine port or island. The Government's afraid the natives'll get hold of 'em—and look where the guns are now! These are Philippine waters!"

"You've hardly landed 'em," said Kelsey. "Nobody can give a bond that their schooner'll not be wrecked on one of the Philippine Islands."

"The rifles are lost right enough now," agreed Randall sadly. "I'll hear what a nice mess I'm in when I get back to Manila, and Sanford, the general manager, has a chance to talk to me. There was no insurance on the *Thetis* this trip—she was to have new masts and a copper bottom when we got back, but the company let the risk slide for one run. And now I've piled her up!"

"But you've got cargo insurance, sure enough?" asked Kelsey.

"What's the good of insuring a lot of junk metal?" demanded Randall dolefully. "Rifles made in the year one—bought as

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FINGER REEF IS SOMEWHERE SOUTHWEST OF MINDANAO

junk, by the ton. What's to insure there? And I'll get my walking-papers from the company—and down I'll go into the black book of the underwriters, insurance or no insurance!"

"Hear anything from Sanford about no trade down this way?" Kelsey asked Randall.

"Hear! That's all I do hear! Didn't I just tell you? We're losing thousands every month because these island blacks are on the fight."

"Why don't the Government do something?" asked Turnkell.

"Why?" echoed Kelsey. "Because they won't interfere in native politics. We've asked for soldiers—or a gunboat; but the Government won't do anything till it's too late, and everybody's dead!"

The cook came in with the coffee.

"How's this trouble between the tribes likely to turn out?" asked Randall.

"Can't tell till Killah's men come over here for a fight. He may wipe Dammang out—and then our concessions on this island go glimmering. And Killah'll get us too—" he paused and listened to the gongs up the valley—"if Dammang's men don't turn loose on us before that," he added. "But I've got rifles and plenty of ammunition, and I believe we could hold off either Dammang or Killah, if the crew helped. Anyway we could make the blacks awful sick of trying to argue with us."

"Drat this fool country!" exclaimed Turnkell. "I wish I'd stuck to the coastin'-trade out o' 'Frisco, 'stid o' comin' out here with a lot of cannibals and natives where a man can't git shipwrecked in any kind o' comfort!"

"They're mad as hornets back there in the jungle," said Randall. "All that gonging sounds bad, I'll tell you! Maybe it's just as well I didn't clear the bar, Kelsey. Why, you'd be here alone! Well, I told 'em in Manila that compass I had wasn't to be trusted— Listen! I believe the blacks are coming down this way through the woods!"

They all listened. Without a doubt the natives were drawing toward the beach, for the three men in the bungalow could hear cries startlingly near. But how many natives were approaching was a question.

"They saw your rockets!" whispered Kelsey. "I knew they'd be on the prowl. They expect Killah's fleet to be over here any hour, and that makes 'em nervous and keeps 'em stirred up. I've got a couple of cases of old army sabers here—we'd better give some out to the crew so they'll feel safer."

They sent the weapons out to the Filipinos. The old bosun had some of his men pushed out in the edge of the brush to keep watch, for they were all afraid of an attack from the jungle.

"I never got gummed up in anythin' like this here," grumbled Turnkell. "I wish I was out of it."

"You're a long way from home, that's certain," said Kelsey. "But it's too late to worry now—this is a case of kill or be killed, if things come to the worst with the natives."

"Why can't we lay outside in one of our boats, cap'n?" asked Turnkell. "We'd be safe afloat—this island gives me the creeps!"

"Oh, take it easy," said Randall. "Kelsey stays here alone most of the time. Can't you stand it here for a couple of days?"

The captain had changed into a suit of Kelsey's pajamas, now he stood near the table drinking coffee from a mug, staring into the smoking lamp.

"You don't stay here alone all the time,

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honest, do ye?" asked Turnkell of Kelsey.

"I had five men with me up till last month, but the company took 'em away because trade had fallen off. But I've got the rifles and a lot of sabers to defend myself with if this house is rushed."

"This house rushed!" gasped Turnkell. "Is there danger o' that?"

"Let up, let up!" growled Randall. "We've got troubles enough on our hands, what with a company schooner on the reef, without listening to your worries about a lot of blacks. I'm for a turn-in and a bit of sleep."

"You won't catch me asleep, not if I keep my right mind," grumbled Turnkell. "I never was in a mess like this in my life, and I've been to sea more'n twenty years. I wish I'd stayed in reach of civilized folks, where if a man got beached in the night he'd have some kind o' pertection for himself. I never did want to mess around with no blacks and chink pirates anyhow, and it serves me right. And, cuss the luck, I've got a bilged left leg!"

Neither Kelsey nor Randall made any comment on the mate's expressions of disgust. The skipper proceeded to let down the folded mosquito-nets over one of the vacant cots, and Turnkell took the hint and got a cot ready for himself. Kelsey put out the lamp, and before long Turnkell's snores rose above the monotonous beating of the surf on the shore.

Kelsey and the captain had adjacent cots, and they remained awake an hour or so, whispering about the wreck and the situation with the warring natives. Along toward morning they too fell asleep.

BY DAWN there was a jabbering swarm of natives on the shore down by the reef. They were launching proas and paddling out to the wreck when Kelsey went on the porch to see what was happening.

"They've got your boats into the water, Randall," he called, and the skipper ran out.

"That's a nice how-de-do!" growled Randall. "We can't get away from the island now if things turn bad."

Turnkell joined them, limping stiffly. His jaw dropped as he saw the scene below the house, but he refrained from making any dismal remarks.

Many of the blacks made their way out on the reef, and from the point of rocks swam to the wreck. Then the stranded schooner was lost to sight under the press of naked bodies, and the scene suggested an army of ants picking the bones of some dead creature. They cut the rigging out of her; they ripped the cabin-trunk apart; bulwarks were hacked away, and the hatch-covers were battered up.

By this time the proas were alongside and gathering the stuff that would not float. Men were swimming ashore on booms and pieces of deck-planking. Anything, from a piece of stay-wire to a length of pipe from the galley stove, made desirable bits of loot for the men who could get away with them. The proas began to ferry their cargoes ashore, dum[illegible]e stuff out and return, while men from the hills packed the salvage up the jungle trails.

"Wait till they find there are old rifles in the hold," said Kelsey.

He was right. When the blacks did find the guns the scene of the wreck became a perfect bedlam. They all began to yell at once, it seemed, and Kelsey made out old Datto Dammang standing on the forecastle, dancing like a madman and shrieking with joy. Men who were half-ashore with pieces of wreckage dropped what they had and swam back to the schooner with frenzied speed in the hope of getting an old rifle.

Captain Randall cursed with explosive fervor.

"Those devils!" he raged. "There you see my eighteen years of hard work to build myself up with the company going to the blasted bow-wows! And not a centavo of insurance!"

"Accidents will happen, sir," said Turnkell.

"You tell that to Mr. Sanford when you get back to Manila!" retorted Randall. "He'll jolly quick tell you that he's not hiring accident-collectors—nor keeping 'em, for that matter."

"Listen!" cried Kelsey, throwing up a hand for silence.

Upon the racket of the wreckers, and the booming of the war-gongs in the hills, a new note broke in—a dull, reverberating sound, something like the roll of sullen thunder, and yet full of a musical clanging.

"What's that?" asked Randall with an alarmed look at Kelsey.

"The blacks're tearing down my new corrugated-iron warehouse at the end of the

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hill-trail," said Kelsey. "That's mighty bad for us!"

"What's in it?" asked Randall. "What good'll it do 'em to rip up an iron house?"

"A lot of old ammunition—for Springfield rifles," said Kelsey grimly. "A couple of tons of it was shipped down here in the *Regina* with Captain Stirkey a month or so ago. The powder was to be extracted from the shells and swapped to the native hunters—a little at a time, for their old muzzle-loaders—in exchange for trade stuff. And some of it was to go to Dammang for his *lantakas*, bamboo and brass cannon that protect his *cotta* back in the valley. Now that they've got your Springfields, the fat sure is in the fire!"

"You mean they'll likely shoot us?" asked the worried Turnkell.

"They'll likely do anything that suits their fancies, once they get to looting. The schooner's wreck started 'em off, and now they find themselves with enough rifles for a small army, along with a supply of ammunition that fits. You don't expect 'em to go fishing or farming with 'fire-sticks' in their hands, do you?"

The Filipino bosun came running around the house in alarm. He said some of the crew watching in the jungle could see the natives wrecking the iron house.

"See that every man comes back and sticks close to the bungalow," commanded Randall. "*Pronto! Sigue* along, or some of your watchers are likely to have their heads blown off. We need 'em all to fight."

But the Filipinos were running in for the bungalow without any urging. The whole crew gathered under the shelter and talked quietly in scared tones.

Before long the sounds of heavy reports came up from the jungle. The blacks were already testing the ammunition in their stolen rifles, and finding it good. A chorus of wild yells expressed their joy, and this was followed by a breaking-out of war-chants. Kelsey knew the meaning of that—the chiefs were inciting the warriors.

"Better get out all your own rifles, Kelsey," said Randall. "We'll be ready for trouble when it hits. And we'd better make sure of plenty of water."

"There's a spring under the back porch," said Kelsey. "But, as you say, we'll get our guns ready."

They went inside, and rifles were put all round the walls and fully loaded. At the same time Kelsey, Randall and Turnkell strapped double cartridge belts on themselves. Then they had breakfast, while the Filipino crew cooked rice for themselves in the little cook-shack close under the eaves of the bungalow.

Turnkell was plainly terrorized. He said nothing, but drank his coffee and ate his turtle eggs quietly, looking up now and then as his ears caught the booming of the gongs in the hills, or the war-chants from the near-by jungle broke out with fresh fervor.

BY NOON the wreck of the *Thetis* had been stripped and her holds emptied. In fact, nothing was left of her but her frame timbers, and over these there was a rippling surf. A few old men still lingered along the rocks of the reef, picking up bits that came ashore, but all the men of fighting age had gone into the jungle with their rifles. The gongs were still going back in the valley, but more quietly now, as if all the warriors had been gathered from the hillsides and Datto Dammang was in war council with his under-chiefs.

At two o'clock Kelsey went out on the porch to look to seaward. The *Regina*, another company schooner, was nearly due from the south, and Randall wanted Captain Stirkey, her master, to be aware of what was going on before coming in to an anchorage. Also, Randall wanted the *Regina* to take him and his men off the island.

But as Kelsey scanned the smooth sea his eyes caught a queer fence-like line on the water to the north—in the direction of Subang Island.

"Randall!" he cried. "Come here! Bring the glasses! If this isn't Killah's war-fleet coming over to fight Dammang I'll buy you a plug hat!"

The skipper ran out, followed by the worried mate.

"Have got! Can do!" exclaimed Randall as he put his glass on the fence-like line Kelsey pointed out.

To the naked eye the line resembled a long bamboo fish-trap on the water, but under the glass it was revealed as two or three hundred war-proas filled with paddlers, a few of the boats having small lug-sails. On some of the outriggers could be seen naked blacks perched on the bamboo cleats to keep the skimming boats from

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capsizing in the stiff breeze that was dead astern of them.

"Sure, that's Killah's fleet," said Kelsey. "If they mop up Dammang they'll get us next. We may have to take to the brush and work down the coast to the south, in hopes of having Stirkey come along and pick us up."

"We haven't a chance in the world if that mob wins the island away from Dammang—and if Dammang wins, his men may take a few shots at us just to celebrate victory," said Randall.

"But we ain't done anything to 'em!" expostulated Turnkell. "I don't see——"

"Did you know that these people down here value a white man's head at about what you'd value an office building in San Francisco?" demanded Randall.

Turnkell stared in horror.

"You don't say?" he gasped.

"I do!" said Randall, and turned to look at the war-fleet again.

"You'll learn something about this devil of a Killah and his tribe before you get out of this, Turnkell," said Kelsey. "Why, three months ago that swarm of warriors you see coming out there in the boats, crossed to Lingaya Island. The natives there were a peaceful lot; but would Killah leave 'em alone? He would not—lured all the men to one side of Lingaya, and then jumped in on their villages and killed all the women and children. Killah simply wiped the tribe out, for no other reason in the world than he wanted the heads."

Turnkell gasped. "What the dickens did he want with the heads?"

Kelsey shrugged his shoulders.

"Wanted 'em for souvenirs—something to show what a wonderful warrior he happened to be. That's the way these blacks measure success. Our idea of getting on in life is to build things—Killah's is to destroy people, and the more he destroys the bigger he gets as a chief. His plan now is to bring this whole group of islands under his rule. Oh, you've got a lot to learn about Datto Killah!"

"I don't want to learn nothin' about that feller!" snorted Turnkell. "He can let me alone; that's all I want—and plenty of sea-room!"

"We'll talk that over a little later," said Kelsey. "If Killah takes this island, I'll let you argue with him—maybe."

The line of boats advanced rapidly. The war-canoes kept pace with the flying proas, for some of the former held as many as sixty paddlers. By this time the flash of the wet paddles could be seen in the sunlight, and the breeze wafted down to the three men on the porch the low hum of the war-chorus chanted by Killah's oncoming forces.

"They are keeping well to seaward," said Kelsey. "That means they intend to come beyond the reef and get the lee of it."

"You're right," agreed Randall. "They'll string along in a line abeam of the shore here—and then each boat will move by the flank and make for the beach."

"And that's where Dammang's men will meet them," said Kelsey. "Look! I can see a head here and there in that jungle below—just inside the rim of the sand!"

"Why, that brush below us is alive with 'em!" said Randall, turning his glass straight down from the bungalow. "I can see that Killah is going to get a hot reception!"

"Spears and blow-guns against your old Springfields," chuckled Kelsey. "I'll bet on Dammang. The crafty old bird is keeping quiet, too. He wants Killah's men to walk into the trap."

The line of boats came on, and now their leading proa was off the point of the reef, but well out from it. The boats and the reef formed a right angle, but with a hundred yards or more of water between boats and point. Reef and shore were deserted, but hidden in the jungle Dammang's men were evidently waiting for the enemy to make a landing.

When the line of boats was well clear of the reef the sailing-proas in the lead began to strike their masts. The war-canoes swung their heads shoreward. Now every boat of the fleet was pointed toward the surf-line below the bungalow, and the reef acted as a breakwater against the swells.

From one big boat near the center of the line—probably Killah's "flag-ship"—there came the deep *bong, bong, bong* of a gong. There was a wild war-cry, and the paddlers bent deep over their paddles and drove the boats for land.

There was no sound from Dammang's men, hidden in the jungle. The boats scudded on till their heads lifted on the gentle rollers, and then over they went. At once the warriors were out and into the water to beach the boats. Spears and bolos flashed in the sunlight, and Killah's advance party dashed across the strip of white sand,

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to seek cover in the jungle and hunt out Dammang's men.

A few remained behind with the boats to cover them and to protect any retreat. Just then there came a dull roar from the sloping hillside below the bungalow. Dammang's hidden men had opened fire, and a terrific burst of lead was poured out upon the attackers and the men with the boats.

The three men up on the porch could see the tiny fountains in the water where bullets struck. They saw many of the men in sight fall, and heard the howls of the wounded.

The firing kept up, and smoke began to rise lazily from the tops of the brush. Men who had reached the rim of the jungle stood still for an instant, thunderstruck. Then they dropped their weapons; and, seeing others falling all about them, they turned and ran for the boats in a wild panic. They had not expected to run into breech-loading rifles! They thought there must be white soldiers on the island; but whoever was back there in the jungle with guns, Killah's men had no desire to meet them at closer quarters.

The white sand of the beach was littered with bodies of the dead and writhing wounded, some of the latter crawling for the boats and crying out for help. But the men at the boats were thinking only of themselves, and there was a mad scramble to launch the craft and get to sea out of range of the bullets.

Some of the smaller proas got out, but they were still in a rain of bullets, and many of the fugitives were hit. And men who had swum after these boats clung to the outriggers and were dragged along, or were shot and drowned. Several of the canoes were capsized by swarms of warriors climbing over them.

"Look there!" cried Kelsey, pointing. "That big fellow with the dozen warriors about him! That's Killah! The one with the scarlet *chawat* about his middle—and carrying the big shield! That's the bird who causes all the trouble down here. They say he has five hundred heads piled up in his private head-house!"

Randall and Turnkell looked. They saw a tall savage running for the biggest proa, which nobody had touched. About him in a ring were a group of warriors closed about their chief in an effort to cover his retreat.

Killah finally threw away his shield and ran without restraint. Some of his men fell—his way along the beach was marked by his stricken warriors, for one fell every few yards; and all about them were the puffs of sand which showed that Dammang's men were making special efforts to finish Killah.

He was within ten yards of his proa when he threw up his arms and plunged headlong into the sand. The warriors left to him paused a second and then went on, taking no heed of their fallen *datto*.

Now a cry of victory rose from the throats of Dammang's men. They began to dart out from the jungle to take the heads of their enemies.

"There goes old Dammang!" said Kelsey. "He took an oath before a witch-doctor to have Killah's head, and he's gone for it himself!"

Randall and Turnkell saw Dammang, a rifle in one hand and a naked *parang* in the other, march out on the beach, surrounded by his body-guard. He wore a great headdress of the tail-feathers of tropical birds, and over his shoulder hung his gaudily painted shield. It was his march of triumph.

His wizards began hopping about and throwing their arms into the air, going through incantations. Dammang approached the body of Killah and held out the *parang*. The wizards spat upon it solemnly, and then Dammang held it aloft—to strike.

He returned to the jungle bearing in his hand the head of Killah.

Far out on the swelly, sun-glinting sea there was a scattered jumble of boats paddling frantically for home. Dammang's men had done their work with those they caught at the boats in the surf or on the shore. The bulk of Killah's men were killed or captured. The sounds of rifle fire from the jungle gradually died away, except for an occasional exuberant shot by some warrior who fired into the air to celebrate the victory.

"Hark at 'em!" said Turnkell. "It sounds down there like an insane asylum on a spree!"

"They always go wild when they get a lot of heads," said Kelsey. "Here you!" he called to the Filipino crew, who had gathered on the ground at the end of the veranda to watch what was happening on the beach, and were chattering in terror. "You keep still, or they'll be up here after us! Dammang's men are crazy now—*loco, loco!*"

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The crew hushed and slunk off behind the bungalow. The jungle below was in an uproar, and from the hill-trails over by the warehouse the women of Dammang's men were calling shrilly for news of how the battle had turned. They had come down from the valley when runners had carried back the story of the attack. Once more the gongs began to talk—now in a wild clatter of delirious joy over the victory.

"This blasted country!" exclaimed Turnkell. "If I'd known six months ago what I know now, I'd never shipped with the company!"

"And I'd give what pay I've got coming to me to see Stirkey sail in with the *Regina*," added Randall. "When did you say he was due, Kelsey?"

"Maybe tomorrow or next day," said Kelsey. "But I'm afraid he won't be here in time to do us much good. There's going to be some doings tonight, with the blacks here, I can tell you. There's no holding 'em when they get on a head rampage."

The hubbub in the jungle went on till the sun dropped out of sight into a sea streaked with crimson and pearl. Then there was a hush, and with darkness the enveloping foliage was filled with unexplained rustlings. The distant gongs in the valley muttered in a low and threatening tone. Their slow double beats seemed to give a warning:

"Take care! Take care! Take care!"

Kelsey lighted no lamps, and the Filipinos were brought into the bungalow and told to make no sound, and to light no match to smoke.

There was scarcely any wind, yet at times it seemed that parts of the jungle were shaken by flurries of the waning monsoon—a sharp and sudden rattling of bushes, or the violent "whip-back" of great creeping vines that were drawn taut and then suddenly released. And Kelsey and Randall knew that the soft smacking sound which they heard now and then close to the house was made by bare feet hustling along over the smooth, earth-packed jungle trails. The Filipinos understood, too—and mumbled prayers as they sat in the dark with rifles across their knees.

"They're packing the heads into the valley," whispered Kelsey to Randall. "And they're cutting rattan creepers to make temporary baskets for their loads."

"And they feel pretty cocky after having trimmed Killah's men," said Randall. "If they were to get it into their heads to go amuck with us—good night!"

They spent a sleepless night, watching and listening, on the alert for anything that might happen. There were several times when Turnkell was sure the savages were creeping in on the house to rush it in the dark; but the prowlers kept clear, and daylight revealed a haggard and hungry group in the bungalow.

Not long after breakfast the sails of Stirkey's schooner were sighted to the southward, and in a couple of hours she had worked up by long boards till she was off the reef. She came in smartly and dropped anchor in the lee of the reef.

"You'd better not lose any time," said Kelsey. "I'd get away with my crew, Randall."

"You're right," said Randall, and began to gather his bags.

The crew started for the beach.

"I'll send a note to Sanford," said Kelsey, and sat down with a pencil and a pad.

"Ain't you goin' along of us?" asked the amazed Turnkell.

"No," said Kelsey. "I've got to stick. When things quiet down I've got to have a chin-chin with Dammang about having his men collect trade stuff and bring it in."

"I wouldn't stay on this fool island another day for a year's pay!" snorted Turnkell as he turned in the door of the bungalow, his bundle of clothes in his hand. "And you better git out now, while the gittin's good."

"I don't intend to quit my job because a few blacks have a little private war," retorted Kelsey, and went on writing.

"Of all the danged fool things I ever heard of!" exploded Turnkell, and headed down the hill for the beach to be sure the *Regina* would not sail away without him.

Kelsey followed with Randall, and Stirkey rowed ashore to meet them and talk things over. He was amazed at the news of the wreck, and how the beach up beyond the reef happened to be strewn with headless bodies.

"I thought the small-pox had killed everybody off when I got a sight of the shore there," said Stirkey as he turned to his boat.

Turnkell and the crew of the *Thetis* had been taken aboard the *Regina*.

"And I'll say you've got your nerve to stick on here the way things are, Kelsey," he added.

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Stirkey hopped into the boat and was rowed out to his schooner along with Captain Randall, who, acting sour and discouraged over the loss of the *Thetis*, shut himself up in his cabin and played solitaire among the marching cockroaches on the bulkheads all the way up to Manila.

TEN days later Randall and Turnkell appeared at the company's office. They wore old and ill-fitting clothes, the charity of Kelsey and Stirkey. They were unkempt, and had such a hang-dog air that the office employees stared pityingly at the captain and the mate. The news of the loss of the *Thetis* had already reached the office—and Sanford, the general manager, was in a temper.

"I guess I'll have to see Mr. Sanford," said Randall to the man who was at the information desk in the general office. "Does he happen to be in this morning?"

"He's waitin' fer ye," said the man, and as he stood up to go to Sanford's private office, whispered behind a hand, "Hard luck, skipper—brace your yards for a squall!"

"It's a lee shore for us, Turnkell," muttered Randall to his mate.

Sanford didn't wait for the captain and the mate to go to his private office; instead he came bouncing out into the general room before all the bookkeepers and typists. He had a sharp nose that drooped, and a sharp chin that jutted upward to meet the nose.

He was very red in the face, and his hair was awry, his pince-nez glasses flopped about on a string fastened to his white coat, and altogether his manner and appearance suggested an infuriated oriental idol. Everybody who knew Sanford declared that he was born to the shipping business, for they all agreed that he had the natural instincts of a pirate.

"You two ought to be on a farm!" he barked, when he caught sight of Randall and Turnkell. "Call yourselves seamen? Not around this shop! Of all the lubberly, sea-going plow-boys I've ever had on the pay-roll, the pair of you take the main prize! The pair of ye ain't fit to——"

"I'm to blame for it all, sir," said Randall meekly. "I told you that compass——"

"No excuses!" bawled Sanford, pointing an accusing finger at Randall. "I trusted you two to take a schooner out without any insurance! And the rifles were bonded to be taken out of the Philippines! Do you take 'em? No! You pile the whole lot up on one of our concession islands! Why, we've got bosuns out in coal-hulks in the bay who could do better than that!

"What good will your excuses do the company if the Government fines us or takes our concessions away from us because we've landed arms where natives are fighting? And as to that, I've just got word that the Government is sending a man over to have a talk with me about this business!"

"If you'd listen—" began Randall again.

"I don't hire captains to run my ships on excuses! I'm done with the pair of you! Go and get jobs in gas-works!"

Randall and Turnkell hung their heads under the tirade. The office employees found excuses to steal away or to hunch down over their books and pretend not to see or hear what was going on.

"Just the same, I'd like to tell you——"

"You can't tell me anything!" yelped Sanford. "See the cashier, both of you! This isn't any navigation school, nor is it a headquarters for explaining for the likes of you. You're done—both of you! Is your head so thick you can't understand that? Done, and that settles it!"

Turnkell gave a gurgling sound, made for the door without waiting for the captain, and disappeared up the Mole.

Sanford bounced back in the direction of his private office.

"But Mr. Sanford!" called Randall pleadingly as he followed after the general manager. "At least, Turnkell isn't to blame. I was on watch when——"

"I won't have any excuses!" thundered Sanford. "But you'd better come in here and make your statement before a stenographer—and tell your little story to that Government man when he shows up."

Randall followed him into the office and Sanford kicked the door shut with a prodigious slam. Then he faced square about on Captain Randall.

"You and Kelsey put that job over to the king's taste," said Sanford.

He was grinning now, and he spoke quietly so his words would not carry to the outer office.

"The old *Thetis* wasn't worth anything, and the junk rifles were cheap. Do you think Turnkell suspects that you ran the *Thetis* ashore?"

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"Sir, *nobody's* the wiser," answered Randall cautiously. "Kelsey's lantern gave me the proper bearings so I got the schooner on the shoal just right and everything went like clockwork with——"

There came a knock at the door.

"What do you want?" demanded Sanford sharply.

He opened the door a trifle and saw his chief clerk outside.

"I can't be disturbed now," added the general manager.

"It's Mr. Herdman—the Government gentleman, sir," said the chief clerk.

"Send him in at once," said Sanford. "Herdman of the secret service, I presume."

A stout man in a white suit and a sun-helmet appeared presently. He had mild blue eyes and a most serious expression on his chubby and florid face.

"You know Captain Randall, don't you, Herdman?" said Sanford. "Sit down and make yourself comfortable."

The door was closed.

"Sure I know Randall," said Herdman as he dropped into a desk chair and nodded at Randall. "Glad to see the captain here—want to talk about this business of going ashore with rifles down in the Gelong group—very serious for the Government—very."

He laid a fat hand out on the desk and tapped it with his finger-tips.

Randall went over the story of his troubles briefly and told how Killah had been defeated and driven off by Dammang with the aid of the salvaged rifles.

"That's all there is to it," concluded Randall. "The whole thing was my fault."

Herdman looked at Sanford.

"It's too bad, Mr. Sanford," remarked the Government agent. "I know you've been asking for troops or a gunboat to attend to Killah. But you understand that if the Government takes sides in every tribal war out here, the tribes will be at war all the time just to get the Government on one side or the other.

"And if we do mix in, the other natives and the folks at home think we're in the business of shooting up helpless people. If we were to send soldiers to mop up Killah and his gang, Killah'd turn out to be a very decent sort of citizen—after we'd killed him. We know him and his whole lot for what they are, and that's as a murdering lot of savages."

"I hope you won't be too hard on us in your report, Mr. Herdman," said Sanford. "Of course, it looks bad—that ammunition on the island just as the rifles in the *Thetis* got aground on——"

Herdman smiled, and his mild blue eyes twinkled.

"My report," he remarked, "will cover the case. Also I shall report the fact that Killah is no longer a problem of the insular Government. As to what has happened—and I am speaking unofficially now—it appears to me that the wreck of the *Thetis* has saved us a costly expedition, has prevented us from being in the position of what some people call 'exploiting helpless natives'—and has saved the lives, without doubt, of some of our soldiers. Killah needed punishment, and he got it. That's all, gentlemen—and don't worry about my report."

He shook hands with Randall, and again there was a twinkle in the eyes of the Government agent—to tell the truth, he almost winked. Then he departed, looking most official and solemn.

"You see!" said Sanford with a smile. "I told you I knew what we were doing, Randall. Go out and hunt up Turnkell now, and tell him you've smoothed things over with me. Both of you sail tomorrow in the *Mongolia* for San Francisco. We're giving you command of our new bark, captain, on the Manila-Frisco run, and you can keep Turnkell as mate. Here! Have a cigar!"

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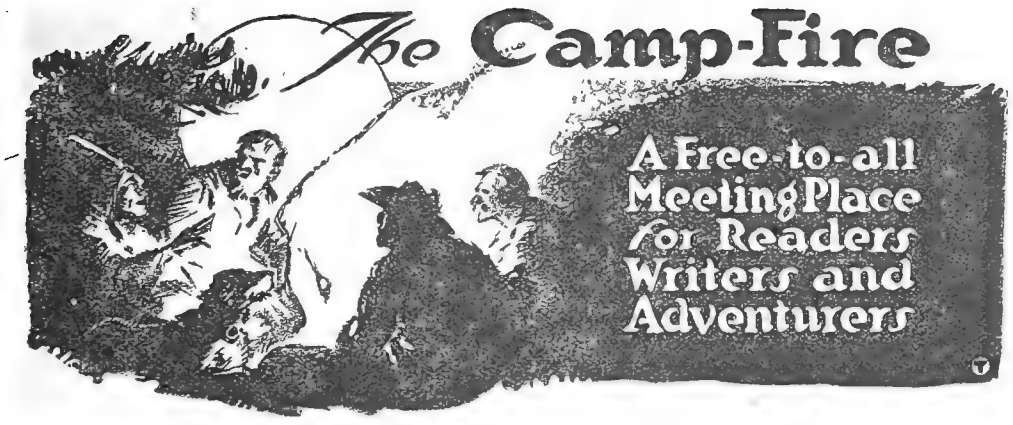


**Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.**

**We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.**

**But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.**

**Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.**

**If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.**

MAGIC-LANTERNS and coyote dogs. But is there any question about dogs crossing with wolves? This letter from our cache dates back a year or more:

Pasadena, California.

I don't know whether this letter is going to be legible, because it is written on a moving train, but it's the only time I can snatch a few minutes to write to you at all.

IN LAMB'S story "The Grand Cham" is something that I'd like to know more about. Either friend Harold made a slip or he brought up a new bit of information. He speaks of the Arabs using magic-lanterns on the streets of the Turkish capital in the time of the crusades. Is this one time when he nodded or is it just another proof that "there is no new thing under the sun"? Understand, I'm not knocking. Just wanted to find out. I know about Chinese printing and other things but thought the magic-lantern belonged to the last century.

SOMEBODY, I can't remember who, brought up the question of the wolf-dogs of fiction and asked if anybody knew about them. I don't know a thing about wolf-dogs but I do know that wherever you keep dogs in a coyote country away from settlements you get an occasional mixed litter. I've had five such litters come under my observation here in California and Arizona. And if wolf-dogs are anything like coyote-dogs, then certainly the fiction writers haven't overdrawn them, for I never saw a coyote-dog in my life that wasn't a pesky nuisance. You can't teach them a thing except by breaking their spirit, and they fight and steal at every opportunity. As to numbers, I can easily conceive that in a country where they abound and dogs run free, there would be lots of crosses, and if coyotes, then why not wolves?—JOSEPH GRAY.

The above letter was sent to Mr. Lamb and here is his reply. But why didn't he give us a good long list of "modern" inventions that date back to the Asia of a thou-



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sand years ago? Gunpowder, compass, spectacles—these I know date 'way back or are said to, but there my knowledge runs out.

Cresskill, New Jersey.

Glad to get Gray's letter. No, speaking of magic-lanterns in "The Grand Cham" was not a case of nodding. Gray, in mentioning the crusades, evidently has associated "The Grand Cham" with an earlier date than 1400, the date of the story.

ONE of the Arabian story-tellers mentions the magic-lantern; and Sir Henry Howorth alludes to it in Asia Minor, a little before the time of my story, I think. Haven't my notes here, so can't be exact; but as I recall it the magic-lantern was mentioned in a Latin treatise on the miracles of light, published about 1600 by Athanasius Somebody-or-other—no, not Ananias. The Ency. Brit. remarks that it is probably of earlier origin.

What the early instrument was like I confess I don't know. It was used at times by wizards, apparently, to materialize ghosts—also for low comedy. Naturally the use of the phrase "magic-lantern" by the two translators above is not real evidence and if I've turned the clock ahead two centuries or more for the invention, I plead guilty.

However, we don't half guess how many inventions and impulses to the sciences that are trotting around the world today labelled "modern" can trace their parentage back to Asia a thousand years or so ago.

It would be really delightful, to me at all events, to learn for a fact that the newest and most vociferous child of the fine arts—our cinema—had a shabby and forgotten father in the person of an Arabian mountebank; just as our no less vociferous spirit-medium has a prototype in the ancient Mongol shaman with his rattling iron images, his darkened tent, his cultivated frenzies and expert ventriloquism.—HAROLD LAMB.

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A WORD from Bill Adams in connection with his story in this issue:

Enclosed yarn is very largely true. I might say *quite true*. The first chapter pictures my humble self sitting alone, my first night out in the old world; a night I recall with great distinctness; and an actual conversation which took place between me and *Glynn*—who was killed that same voyage. *Wood* is straight from life; and is, or was directly we arrived in port, in an asylum for the insane, the hardships we encountered having broken him. The description of the blow and the consequent shift of cargo are just as they happened. *Wispy* and *One Eye* are from life.

And still, to-day, after all the long years,
"The flowers down her furrows are fairest
of all to Johnnie, poor Johnnie."

The end of the yarn, the meeting between *Tim* and the new chum, when *Tim* passes on *Glynn's* warning, is very much from life.

ONCE, after the old sea had broken me, and I was upon a train journey, I met in the railway station of a great seaport a young lad with the appearance of a new chum—one gets to know them. I was dressed in rags, my shoes broken across the instep, an old coat, given to me by a poor woman in the slums, frayed and ragged at sleeves and elbows, protecting me from the Winter weather: I went up to the lad and said I—just what *Tim* and *Glynn* say in this yarn. He looked up at my battered six feet three derisively, scornfully, unbelievingly.

And that is how it goes.

Says I, "Little maiden, I hear the sea's call, your
Johnnie, poor Johnnie."

—BILL.

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BECAUSE our filing system went wrong, we can't find the name and address of comrade "D" who wrote the letter in question. Will he drop a line to the inquirer?

31 Hooker Ave., Braintree, Massachusetts.

If possible please send me the name and address of the man who wrote about Chinese cross bows in Camp-Fire, Feb. 18, 1921. I would like to get a copy of the cross bows he described. Hoping you find him.—EDWARD WALKER.

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WE SELDOM talk about the good work our "Lost Trails" does, but here is a sample of what it can accomplish. Naturally it doesn't find them all, but consider that in many cases newspapers, detectives and personal efforts have all been tried without results. Also, as in this case, the inquiry may have to bridge many years. Still again, many of those asked for can not be found by any human agency.

Through the agency of a "Lost Trail" inserted in a recent number Mrs. —— located her two cousins. One was in Bolivia, S. A., the other in Costa Rica, C. A. Considering that Mrs. —— had not seen or heard from her cousins for thirty years we think you will agree with us that the result is remarkable.

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DO TARANTULAS commit suicide and does a live one stay by his dead mate?

Brownsville, Texas.

Here is a little information I thought possibly some of you "old-timers" might be interested in and could cite similar cases.

LAST Summer, while in charge of the lumberyard for one of the local companies here, I had occasion to move a stack of heavy timbers from one part of the yard to another. Each timber was separated from the one beneath by several small sticks spaced down its length to cause circulation of air to keep them dry. After several timbers had been moved one of my men called my attention to a large tarantula that had just been uncovered. Climbing up on the timbers, I discovered the empty shell of a tarantula that had been dead possibly two months and a big live one within two inches of it. Sending a Mexican for one of the large mouth bottles we had, quart size, and getting a stick about three feet long,

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we proceeded to herd the tarantula into the bottle and screwed on the lid. Taking him over to a cleared space, I unscrewed the lid and dumped him out, when he started to walk away, raising his body high off the ground and walking stiff-legged, placing each leg slowly and carefully on the ground.

THE Mexicans say their bite is very dangerous and that they can jump a distance of from four to six feet, but this one failed to jump, so I do not know. Placing the tarantula back into the bottle, I started walking toward my office, holding the bottle in front of me and watching him. After about four attempts to climb the sides of the bottle he either threw himself or fell on his back. I stopped walking and, holding the bottle where the bright sunlight would strike full upon him, I saw a thick milky looking substance coming from his mouth. He then raised his two small front "legs" that are located directly in front of their heads, and proceeded to dip his "fangs" *up* and *down* not *sideways* like other spiders, into this secretion. His fangs were curved just like those in a rattlesnake and, after dipping them several times, he *pulled* the two little legs over them and seemed to stick his fangs into them. He repeated this three times or possibly four and in less than a minute was stone dead. He had committed suicide.

I EXAMINED his fangs later and found them hollow with exceedingly sharp points.

Now I would like to ask you old-timers a question: Do tarantulas mate, and why did he or she stay by the remains of the dead one?—A. S. LANIER.

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SOMETHING from Frederick Moore about his story in this issue:

New York City.

All the characters are absolutely fictitious.

When I was in the Government service in the Philippines I learned of an offer to carry out a plan something like the story of "Shipwrecked," which was not so elaborate. The offer was rejected and the Secret Service warned. The two men who put the plan up to a trading company are since dead, and only three persons knew of the idea—the head of the importing house, the chief of the Customs Secret Service and myself.—FREDERICK MOORE.

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RATHER against my will I was persuaded to read a certain book-length novel. There were several reasons why it could not be passed on to you as a serial in our magazine, and mighty few things do I read unless they are possibilities for our pages. Well, to cut this short, that story proved to be the kind you "can't lay down." Mr. Noyes had read it before I did. He waited till I'd read it and then told me it had kept him up until far into the morning.

But there were those reasons for not using it in the magazine, reasons strong enough to stop any editor. To cut it short again, we finally said: "To —— with objections! A lot of our readers would like that story as much as we do. Some wouldn't like it maybe, but if any editor could print even one story each issue that *all* readers did like he'd die of surprize and joy. Two or three a year of such would nearly wreck his constitution. And this story has kick enough to hold most people."

Careful second thoughts didn't change our decision. The objections were obvious, but that story was too good not to pass on to you. So we're doing it. We hope you'll like it. If not, tell us so.

NOW as to those objections. The first was so serious that I think I'm safe in saying no other magazine would have dared print the story. I can learn of only one or two cases of such a thing's being done by any American magazine at any time—only one, indeed, that I'm sure of. This objection is that in 1915 this story, "The Sea Hawk," by Raphael Sabatini, was issued in book form by the J. B. Lippincott Co. Only two thousand copies were printed. American magazines don't publish stories that have been published as books in this country. This is the custom, the unwritten rule, sanctified by years and years of unquestioning obedience.

No magazine, of course, is under any moral obligation to obey the rule. Obedience is supposed to be a matter of self-interest. Printing such stories in a magazine is commonly supposed to be bad business, not a paying thing to do. Rules and customs are good things, but personally, when no moral obligation is involved, I'm not strong for obeying them just because they're there. I've been obeying this one all right, but only because until recently I didn't have sense enough to shake myself loose from habit and try to do some thinking about it for myself. It is the regular, accepted procedure for a story to appear as a book after it has appeared as a serial. Why is it impossible ever to change "magazine first, book second" to "book first, magazine second"? What are two thousand copies scattered among 100,000,000 people some half-dozen years ago? That is about as small a fiction book edition as is ever printed.

Also, if we *don't* publish this story, practically none of our readers will ever get to read it. And, while we may be mistaken, we believe most of you will enjoy reading it as much as we did.

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SO WE'RE publishing it. And I very much want you to tell me frankly what you think of this breaking of custom. When I talk about "our" magazine, I mean "our." So far as it is physically possible I want you to decide what kinds of stories are to go into it. Not because I'm a noble being and a philanthropist, but because it seems to me merely horse sense to give our readers what they really want instead of trying to make them want what we happen to give them. So when I say I want your honest opinion on this experiment, believe me, I mean it.

Tell me two things. First, do you think our magazine is ever justified in printing any story that has already been published as a book? Second, do you like the one we are printing?

I FULLY realize that, though we have bought and paid for the right to publish this story, we risk a loss of prestige and standing through doing what is frowned on by magazines in general. And readers (though most of them don't realize it) accept and swallow the rules and customs that magazines establish. There will be cries of "Why can't you get enough brand new stories to fill your pages with, instead of running in old stuff?" We can, of course. That's what we've been doing for a dozen years. But what we want to find out is whether *you want us to*. We'll do whichever way you say. But you'll have to say, if you want us to know how you feel and to do what you want. If you just sit back and praise or cuss to yourself or your friends, it won't get you anywhere. We can't do what you want unless you tell *us* what it is.

I don't mean that we have any crazy idea of filling our pages with stories that once appeared as books. Not at all. You seem to like the magazine pretty well on the whole and, so long as you do, there is every reason for keeping it about as it is. But there is also every reason to be on the lookout for any change of which you approve.

Twice we broke another custom by printing a second time two things that had originally appeared in our own pages and nowhere else—Talbot Mundy's "The Soul of a Regiment" and the Rev. Mr. Knickerbocker's funeral sermon over the body of Riley Grannan. In these cases we had not only your requests in advance but your enthusiastic endorsement afterward. The present case is a little different, and we want to know whether you endorse or condemn.

As a matter of fact—as opposed to opinion—I'd like to know just how many of you did read this story in book form. I'll be glad if any of you who did read it drop me a personal postcard or letter saying so. This is in the interest of all the readers of our magazine.

TO ME the experiment seems justified, at least as an experiment. And, if it gets your endorsement, I confess I'd be pleased to see our magazine smash a time-honored custom of magazines and set up a new custom for the others to follow, if they have the courage. If you don't endorse it, well, I'll be glad there was a chance to get your opinion and guidance. I sort of like to talk things over with you. And if I propose something that the majority of you do not approve, I'm always ready to listen to reason.

In this case, though, I have hopes. Speaking just as a fiction-reader myself, if I like a story, I don't care a great deal where it comes from. In the case of one I like very much, I like to read it again later on. In which I'm probably just like many of you. I can think of quite a few stories I read years ago that I'd like to read again if I could get them. But I can't. Somehow many of them aren't on the stands any more, not even on the second-hand stands, or at least I don't run across them. (Yes, I do read a few stories besides those for our magazine and I have a boy who helps me read some of these old stories when I can find them and they're not too old for him.) I'd not object at all to a magazine that would reprint some of those books for me. Maybe you're the same way and have your own list of books you'd like to read again if you could get them. I'd like to know what they are, if you ever feel like talking about them.

Well, let me know how you feel about our experiment of publishing "The Sea Hawk." I've talked through a lot of space about it because I'm a whole lot interested in getting your opinion and wanted to set forth the case in full. Now it's up to you.

---

YOU don't have to ask for a seat, you know. Just make yourself at home:

Missoula, Montana.

Guess I've kept quiet just about as long as it is possible, but then you'll excuse me, I know, for it's

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been a long time since Camp-Fire first attracted my attention and well! she's been attracted ever since.

WHILE my experiences have been somewhat humdrum, they also have been a bit scattered—oh! mere piker stuff, if compared with those of "Hard Shells" who sit in the "bald-headed row." However, they started well with Crazy Snake's last uprising in the old Indian Territory when Muskogee was a mere collection of shacks and one railroad. Since then I've just sort of wandered around. Happened to be in Mexico in 1910 when Madero started things—yeh! and it just happened that I got out—kinda weak and worn—much mis-handled, but still alive. Have hunted everything to be hunted in New Mexico, Sierra Nevadas and Cascades on the West Coast; have landed my sheep in British Columbia and, well, just the rest of the things a fellow does when he's looking for fun in the West, and by the way, I spent two years in your town, hunting, too, though 'twas only humdrum business affairs. My office was at Warren and Broadway; used to sit and look out over City Hall Park, watch the daily struggle of the seven million trying to rush the "Bridge" and wish I was either West or dead—at that, I'm West. Had my fling at the Big Fuss in the M. T. C.—truck-train—ammunition, and now besides all that I'm a traveler with eleven States, British Columbia and Mexico for a territory. This last is not an apology, merely an excuse.

So if all or any part of this entitles me to a niche, I'd like to hunker down and watch the little flames and listen while I suck my bacon-rind.—I. S. H. POPE.

P. S.—Please send a button!

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THE following were "notes to the editor" by Gordon Young on the manuscript of "Horrezko," the complete novelette in this issue. You'll have no trouble in connecting them with the parts of the story on which they bear.

1: A few weeks ago a convict made practically just such an escape as I have described from a California train. Moreover, he had warned everybody, including his guard, that he would escape.

2: I never before ventured to have a shot fired in an apartment without its attracting outside attention, or at least explaining it away as an exploded tire. But recently in a prominent Los Angeles apartment house a man killed a woman, then shot himself, and attention was not attracted to that apartment until the odor of the corpses caused the door to be broken down. Again, only a few weeks ago, some bandits raided a poker-game in a downtown hotel and shot one player who refused to put up his hands; and no attention was attracted until the robbers left and the victims raised an alarm. I have had some personal experiences too that bear out the above; but somehow it has always *seemed* incredible that a shot could be fired without raising up everybody around about.

3: This "artfully ghastly light" is the sort of thing used in many movie studios; to the eye of the camera it makes everything look natural; but to the human eye it gives everything a horribly half-decayed purplish hue.

ON THE following discussion I can't venture anything except that it's mighty interesting. There are among us other historians and other soldiers, among them generally recognized authorities on military tactics and therefore on history so far as bearing on this subject. I'm hoping some more of you will come forward and, incidentally, do authorities agree to any extent as to who is the greatest general of history?

Kamloops, British Columbia.

First I should like to say how much I enjoyed Mr. Brodeur's excellent yarn, "Fisherman's Luck," but as a bit of an historian myself and a soldier as well, I can not let his statement that "tactics were still primitive" go by. Tactics, that is the broad principles, haven't changed worth a cent.

IN THE late war when we lay out all night right under the Boches' nose and let his barrage go over us to the empty trenches and then rushed him at dawn and carried Langemark, we were only fighting the second battle of Barnet (Eng.) over again. Warwick the King-maker got done in the eye just the same.

To go further back, Alexander's idea of holding the enemy with his phalanx and taking them in the dark with his heavy cavalry has not been improved on to this day.

Julius Cæsar, again, and Hannibal and quite a few other successful generals never made any bad tactical mistakes, or they would not have been successful generals. Let Mr. Brodeur look up the Battle of Lake Trasimene if he doubts me.

To come to the times he deals with, William the Conqueror was a very skilful tactician; witness his battle with the French king when he lured him to cross the river by a ford and caught him with half his men on one side and half on the other. (Hannibal played the same game on the Romans, by the way.) I forget the name—I am writing this out in the wilds where books are scarce.

ALTOGETHER brains counted, as Mr. Brodeur says, heavily. Although battles were fought hand to hand, yet the commander with the most brains (given other things equal) usually won out.

I think that you were right in your contention *re Pierre's* age. Twenty-two is quite early enough for a soldier to rise from the ranks to a responsible position. Plenty of men commanded armies at a younger age (William of Orange, for instance) but they weren't fisher lads to start with. Pierre's tactics were perfectly sound. "Give the enemy what he wants and then something he doesn't want."

To sum up, times change and weapons change, altering the formations of armies beginning battles (they end the same old way), but the principles on which a general thinks out his plan of battle haven't changed since way earlier than the Middle Ages. I am aware I am entering an argument with a college professor, and I do so with some fear and trembling, but military history bears me out.—G. H. WILLES, Late Lieutenant M. G. C. (British).

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The above was forwarded to Mr. Brodeur and here is his reply:

Upsala, Sweden.

As the point Lieut. Willes makes is an important one from the standpiont of any author writing historical yarns, I'd like to argue the matter—as briefly as possible. I note that the letter is endorsed "Camp, desk," which seems to mean that it is possible material for Camp-Fire discussion. I think, if you can spare the space, it might be well to print the discussion in Camp-Fire.

FIRST, I agree perfectly with Lieut. Willes that in the Middle Ages, as now, "the commander with the most brains (given other things equal) usually won out," although "times change and weapons change." But that doesn't affect my statement that, in the 12th century, "tactics were still darn primitive." Among the weapons that have changed since then were the weapons of human brawn and of accumulated strategical wisdom. Nowadays physical strength counts for far less than it did in the Middle Ages. Witness the battle of Otterbourne (not in the ballad-version, but in its historical form, which the ballad distorts), where the Douglas, by sheer brute force, held his own for an almost incredible time against a much superior English party. As soon as he was struck down, the advantage created by his personal strength was destroyed, and the Scots beat it for home.

Again, the modern general has not only his personal brains to draw on, but the sum total of military knowledge and cunning stored up and written down through the ages. A modern battle is not merely a battle of the immediate personnel, but also a battle of the accumulated strategical lore, and the power to utilize that lore, which has been a-gathering from all ancient and modern history. The brains of the leaders immediately involved are utilized to select and apply the particular form and type of that accumulated knowledge which best suits the occasion. The element of brains—that is, the commander's personal cleverness—also enters in, of course, when he has to meet an unforeseen contingency. Sometimes it also happens that a trick as old and stale as Methuselah's goats will win a battle today; but the fact remains that the modern officer is not left to the inspiration of the moment and his own cleverness when he is undergoing his training; he studies tactics.

I WRITE this with hesitation, knowing that Lieut. Willes is an experienced soldier and I am not. But what follows I write with some confidence. To prove that the strategy of the 12th century was not primitive he cites Alexander, Hannibal, Cæsar and William the Conqueror. It is true that these generals not only had brains, but—with the exception of William—were accomplished tacticians and strategists. But they were the fine fruits of old and highly developed civilizations. Alexander began his career with an army that his father had already organized in the phalanx, on the basis of the less developed phalanx of Epaminondas; Alexander improved on his dad as his dad had improved on Epaminondas. And the latter in turn had adapted his machine and his strategy from the Spartan methods, going them ten better. All these men had not only centuries of military experience among civilized peoples to draw from, but also had developed their wits in the famous Greek schools of philosophy and mathematics. Though these subjects are not military in the first instance, mathematics does help directly; and Greek philosophy was splendid training for subtlety.

Moreover, these men represented a high civilization; and, other things being equal, a civilized man makes a better strategist and tactician than a barbarian. The more training a man's mind has received, the better he can apply his mind to other subjects even than those he has studied in the schools.

NOW for Hannibal. He and his countrymen had all the military lore of Greece to draw on; Hannibal himself had made a careful study of Alexander's methods, as witness his reply to Scipio Africanus, when the latter asked him who was the world's greatest general. His tactics—involving the use of a mobile army of professionals—were the refinement of Alexander's.

Now for Cæsar. He was not a professional soldier, but a student of Greek philosophy and letters, and a politician. When he received his first military command he had two great advantages. The first was his private study of the methods of Alexander, Pyrrhus, Hannibal and Pompey. The second was that the army organization that came to his hand had been perfected, before his time, by the successive skill of Fabius, Nero (not the emperor Nero, of course), Scipio the elder and S. the younger, and—above all—Marius. Marius had reconstituted the army, armed it with newer and better types of weapons, and improved the commissariat. These advantages, plus what George Lyman Kittredge calls "the splendid accident of genius," made him the first soldier of the ancient world. But it must not be forgotten that these generals of Greece and Rome were the finest flower of civilizations that were highly developed and continuously ancient, long before their time.

NOT so with William the Conqueror, and I deny that he was a skilled tactician. In his battle with the French king he showed superior brains, but in a highly simple stratagem—however much that stratagem may have been used since and without regard to the fact that genius often uses simple methods. The point was that William was not a tactician, because he had only one trick—the one he used against the French king was much the same that he used against Harold at Hastings. He simply lured the other fellow out of his position, and hit him when he had fallen into disarray. It was not so much that his brains were wonderful and his resources vast as that the other fellow had neither brains nor strategical resources at all. (That's rather rough on Harold at Hastings: he tried to hold his men back, but they fell for William's ruse and disobeyed orders). And it should be remembered that, although William got to Senlac Field long before Harold, and had plenty of time to pick out a place of vantage and dope out his strategy, he let the chance slip. Harold came up later, found the hill of Hastings unoccupied, and squatted down on it. That doesn't make William out a tactician.

Next, William began the battle on the aggressive, choosing his own method; he chose to rush the hill—which Harold had roughly fortified, and on which the Saxons were drawn up in good formation. That is, William made the mistake of charging up a hill

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against unshaken infantry. Result—he was thrown back with heavy loss again and again. At last, a ray of sense percolated through his dense dome—he pretended flight, and the Saxons, disobeying Harold's orders, rushed after him helter-skelter. He brought his cavalry round and rode them down. Even then, the handful of household guards remaining to Harold held out for hours against repeated charges, until William had another glimmer of sense and, pulling off out of javelin-cast, had his archers shoot the Saxons to pieces. The Saxons had no bowmen. Centuries of warfare against the bow-using Danes had not taught them sense enough to regard the bow as an important arm.

Even then the Normans would not—or might not—have won if the Saxons had been fresh when the battle began. But they had recently won a tough fight against the Norwegians at Stamford, and then—with no rest and with inadequate provisions—had marched all the way from Stamford to Hastings to meet William. Strategy? William showed it rather late in the game; and the type he used was so simple and obvious that I think the phrase "darned primitive" describes it pretty well. More than half his losses in the battle were totally unnecessary. If he'd had the wits to open the battle at long range, with volleys of arrow-flight, he could have thrown the Saxons into confusion and ridden them down at his leisure. But this simple type of strategy did not occur to English or Norman leaders as the proper caper till Edward I—more than two centuries later—tried it out against the Scots. Holy smoke, how it worked! And it surprized all Europe—but it didn't teach the Scots anything. Three hundred years later Henry VIII beat them with the same old trick. And yet, could anything be simpler?

N. B.—You can't draw any inference as to tactics in the twelfth century from the tactics of Greece, Carthage and Rome. The overthrow of the Western Roman Empire by the barbarians put an end to that, for the most part. True, the Eastern Empire inherited it, but they did not influence Western Europe till the time of the Third Crusade—that is, not materially, except in castle-building. Western European strategy began in the Frankish Empire, with the substitution of cavalry—adopted from the débris of the late Roman system—for the Germanic infantry. The Franks under Charlemagne showed considerable skill in tactics, but this was due to Charlemagne's personal genius, and proved a flash in the pan. His successors went back to the old bang-smash-swat method of man to man and horse to horse.

William the Conqueror was a Norman, and the Normans had adopted the Frankish cavalry organization together with the infantry organization they had inherited from their Norse ancestors. They probably got their effective use of the bow also from Scandinavia. But they used their military organization in the crudest way, for the most part. Their infantry was still used in the old shield-wall formation that goes back to the Scandinavian bronze age; only the Normans never showed as much skill in its use as their ancestors had. Like the later Franks, they forgot all Charlemagne's lessons as to the tactical use of cavalry. Every man of aristocratic lineage furnished his own horse and arms and a lot of blue blood; and therefore he considered himself privileged to fight largely as he pleased. He preferred the method of riding into the nearest opponent full tilt and settling the issue man to man. Until the time of Edward the First, the medieval battle was usually a thousand separate individual duels, with the mêlée coming only after both sides had fallen into an inextricable mass from the series of promiscuous single combats.

NOW and then a leader showed himself who could weld his host into a homogeneous army, and use it according to the advantage that showed itself; but only very rarely do we find a leader planning his array or the use of his various arms beforehand. Even after Edward I, the old method was all too common; England had to be taught the lesson of Bannockburn before it was ready for the real *tactics* of Crecy and Poictiers. And if Bruce was a strategist at Bannockburn, he learned his strategy only after being smashed in battle after battle of the old-fashioned man-to-man kind.

The average battle of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was won in one of two ways: either it was settled by the superiority of one side in plain brute force (as Richard I won all his victories against Saladin), or it was settled by the possession, by one side or the other, of a little rudimentary common sense. In this second case, cleverness was almost never matched against cleverness; a small amount of sense was matched against utter, bull-headed imbecility. That was the situation when William beat up the French; it was the case much later when James IV of Scotland calmly let the English get themselves out of an impossible position because it would not have been knightly to take a tactical advantage over them. Then the English took a tactical advantage by holding off and using the gray-goose feather—and they never really did identify James' body.

THE reason for the absence of strategy (or rather, the almost complete absence of strategy) in the Middle Ages is this: the overthrow of Rome by the barbarians swept the deck clean, and established a new deal, militarily as well as in art, architecture and literature. A few military principles did filter down to the barbarians, but only isolated geniuses like Charlemagne ever understood or used Roman strategy; and the peoples of Europe were too barbaric for many centuries to develop principles of their own. They all adopted the idea of the armored horseman, but it took them ages to learn how to use him, or how to use infantry against him. They kept on using the old barbaric methods that their leaders had inherited from their barbaric Germanic ancestors.

Only when the general condition of medieval social and intellectual civilization had progressed enough to develop the sense of centralized organization, and after medieval learning had revived enough to train men's brains somewhat, did they learn to develop tactics or strategy instead of relying purely on brawn and better weapons. You can't have tactics till you have a real military organization; and you can't have such an organization on the basis of the earlier feudal system. That system had to develop—as in England during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—before it could place at the disposal of generals men who had the brains and the willingness to subject their tempers to discipline which are necessary for tactical employment. The reason why small English armies smashed the better-mounted, better-armed and more numerous French

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at Crecy, Poictiers, and Agincourt was that England developed its social—and therefore its military—organization to the point where it could be tactically employed, much sooner than France did. The English armies used by Edward III were based on a social and military centralization under the king; the contemporary French armies were gatherings of individual barons with their dependents. They wouldn't submit to discipline or orders, and they couldn't cooperate.

FINALLY, it isn't correct to mistake the inspiration of the moment for tactical genius. When William had his inspiration at Hastings, it worked out in rudimentary tactics that fooled the simple Saxons; but its tardiness proved him no tactician. Such single incidents of bright inspirations are found in the 11th and 12th centuries, but they were rare, and the usual method was that of champion against champion and mass-charge front-on against mass-charge. That's where *Pierre* has the advantage of his opponents—he is cleverer, and has bright inspirations oftener—partly because he learned to discipline his brains under that almost isolated genius, Alphonse of Toulouse.

I didn't mean this to be either so long or so argumentative. I cordially appreciated Lieutenant Willes' good letter and I feel very humble in the presence of his military experience. But I'm sure I'm right in asserting that the tactics of classical times had no influence on or connection with the 12th century. And if one weighs the great mass of 11th and 12th century warfare against the few isolated instances where exceptional leaders showed a brief flash of tactical ability, one must conclude, as I did, that the "tactics were still darn primitive" at that time.—ARTHUR G. BRODEUR.

P. S.—Lieut. Willes rightly says that "the broad principles of tactics haven't changed worth a cent." My point is that not even those broad principles were much understood or used in Western Europe in the 12th century.—A. G. B.

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FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom Nictzin Dyalhis rises and introduces himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

Sugar Grove, Pennsylvania.

"Hello, the Fire!"

In the old days it paid to stand off and yell, and not approach too close until actually invited. Of course, the invitation is an open one, but even so, although frequently tempted to walk into the light, I have refrained until I felt justified in coming in out of the wet.

BY PROFESSION I am a chemist. In years nearly fifty—in heart, about sixteen—my wife's mother says I've never grown up! One way she's quite right, for I am one of these sawed-off, hammered-down, weazened-up runts weighing—when I'm fat-and-sassy—from five to ten pounds over one hundred.

A long time ago I went to the South-west. My intentions were good—I was going to assay all the ore west of the Rockies!

Rex Beach wrote a book once called "Pardners"—in that book an old-timer says: "Thar's two diseases no doctor has any right meddlin' with—one's hoss-racing, t'other's prospectin.'" He's quite right! I know! Assaying? Pooh-pooh! An old man, with more pity on my ignorance than I deserved, took me with him on the desert.

Bitten at a tender age, what hope remained for one thus afflicted?

SURE, I've done lots of other things since, but—I went one trip snapper-fishing in the Gulf when only a "kid-of-a-boy." I took one trip and only one "down-de-bay" out of Baltimo' on an oyster-dredger in the bad old days of the "pungy," the "bug-eye," and the "brogan-canoe"! I've signed out on more than one "tall water" cruise, but I invariably turned up missing before the return trip. Because why? Prospectin' was good somewheres up-country!

I've prospected for gold, silver, platinum, tungsten, several of the commercial minerals, and, above all, for gems and precious stones, including pearls (fresh-water variety), also, turquoise and ruby (domestic and foreign). Did I ever strike it rich? I'll say I DID! I'm worth exactly eleven million seven hundred thousand dollars—in experiences which otherwise I might never have had! Money? How do you get that way? I'm dead broke!

"Never made any?" Oh, yes, I did—but I used it! What am I to do when Winter comes? Before next snow-fly I'll be on the trail again. Following that—I should care! And the worst of it all is—my wife aids and abets me in my sins! And she's no slouch with a pan, a dry-washer or a jassacks! She can tie all "them" hitches—hackamore, hobble, diamond and squaw. Also, she knows a dang-sight more than I do about pearls.

Now I've no contract to use up all the paper in sight, so here we rest—*you* probably need it after this screed!

And to you about the Fire—may your shadows never grow less! And to those on the trails—may your feet never grew wearied!

And so—Good-night.—NICTZIN DYALHIS.

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THERE are lots of "Aussies" among us and Camp-Fire gives them a chance to get into touch with each other:

Hastings, Florida.

Kia Ora would like to "sit in" and be one of the Camp-Fire gang. I am a New Zealander by birth and have traveled all around Australia, the South Sea Islands from Samoa, Papeete (Tauiti), in the French Marquesas, Suva, Nuafaloka, Vaovau, in the Cook Island and many of the other groups including the Hawaiians—in Honolulu and Hilo. I've traveled the Western States quite a bit and am giving the South the once over now and intend moving up to see New York pretty soon. Was engaged in transport work during the war in the British Mercantile Marine and have been to India, Africa, Egypt, France, Italy, England and in Vancouver, B. C., Canada.—ED DIGGS.

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**Various Practical Services to Any Reader.**

In the last issue of each month are printed in full the friendly services of *Adventure* to readers: Free identification card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding Service; Back Issues Exchange; Camp-Fire Buttons; Camp-Fire Stations, etc.

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# Ask Adventure

**A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.**

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service (except our assaying and oil services) free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

***Please Note:*** **To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.**

1, 2. The Sea. In Two Parts
3, 4. Islands and Coasts. In Two Parts
5, 6. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
7. Australia and Tasmania
8. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
9. New Guinea
10. Philippine Islands
11. Hawaiian Islands and China
12. Japan
13. Asia, Southern
14—20. Africa. In Seven Parts
21. Turkey and Asia Minor
22, 23. Balkans. In Two Parts
24. Scandinavia
25. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
26, 27. South America. In Two Parts
28. Central America
29, 30. Mexico. In Two Parts
31—37. Canada. In Seven Parts
38. Alaska
39. Baffinland and Greenland
40—45. Western U. S. In Six Parts
46—49. Middle Western U. S. In Four Parts
50—53. Eastern U. S. In Four Parts
Our Assaying and Oil Services
Weapons, Past and Present. In Three Parts
Old Songs That Men Have Sung
Fishing in North America
Mountains and Mountaineering
Standing Information
Lost Trails

## "Ask Adventure" Notes

BROTHER BEADLE writes:

An idea I've wanted to suggest for some time is just brought to mind by two gentle guys who want information on Rhodesia, Transvaal, B. E. A. and Upper Congo on trading, climate, customs of the people, customs laws, immigration laws, living conditions, mining, witchcraft, religion, fares, sport, adventure, geography, hunting, transport and, as one blessed soul adds, "general items of interest!" Why not shove in a note to the effect that no encyclopedic queries will be answered; only specific questions of those contemplating serious action? Or words to that effect? There might be one



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exception—namely, witchcraft, on which subject I have a monograph covering it in a general way.

Correct, Brother Beadle; the note is hereby officially shoved in. We've been trying for some years, and so have all the "A. A." men, to hammer this point home, and most of the inquirers understand it now. But a dumb-bell has no brains. If he had, he wouldn't be a dumb-bell.

BROTHER EMERSON orates as follows:

Will you mention in *the* magazine that the International Reply Coupons are not worth a —— after thirty days, and it sometimes takes more than that to make the round trip? Why not suggest that our "A. A." friends send U. S. A. stamps instead, and thus said stamps can be utilized by the "A. A." man in foreign parts when he orders goods from the U. S. A., the price of which does not amount to much, and can therefore be paid in stamps?

All right, inquirers; send the reply postage either in International Reply Coupons or in stamps. *Only be sure to send the reply postage!* We'll redeem the stamps that our "A. A." experts don't want—or the coupons either, for that matter.

### Dragon's-Blood Again

IN THE June 10th issue appeared a Q. and A. regarding a resin known as dragon's-blood. H. Bedford-Jones supplements this information in the subjoined letter which he sent to Captain Giddings, the "A. A." expert in charge:

I noticed the "dragon's-blood" inquiry, and at the same time came across some account of the same thing written by Capt. George Roberts about 1725. In case any one else ever shows up for that same item, here's what Roberts says about St. Nicholas, in the Cape de Verde Islands:

"This island did once very much abound with Dragon trees, the gum or juice of which running out, when cut at a proper season, yields the gum call'd Sanguis Draconis which is very well known to Druggists and used in the Medicinal Art. . . . When Captain Avery the Pirate touch'd here . . . he burnt all the town . . . so they were forced to cut down the Dragon Tree, a loose grained wood and hollow in the middle, going tapering upwards, something like the bore of a pump; and with these trees they roofed and floor'd their houses again. Now it is so scarce that I question whether there be 20 or 30 pounds of that gum made yearly on that Island."

Nothing much to this except that it's a curious and unusual item, which might fit in somewhere. Hope it does.—H. BEDFORD-JONES.

It may interest you to know that we have scheduled for publication in the December 20th issue a novelette by Mr. Bedford-Jones, entitled "Pirates' Gold" which purports to relate some of the adventures of this same Captain Roberts—right among the Cape Verdes, too.

***Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in alternate issues of the magazine. Do not write to the magazine itself.***

### Chances in British East

SOMEBODY'S going to clean up on cattle there. Want in?

*Question:*—"I am thinking very seriously of taking up cattle-ranching and prospecting in Africa when I get out of the service of the United States, and wish to know what the conditions of grazing are and whether the grass is good the year around or if you have to put up hay and what the animal life is there and how much it would cost to take your own private saddle-horse. That is, duty at custom office over there.

What are the cattle like and what are the chances of the game in general? I have punched cattle ever since I was big enough to sit a horse, and know the game pretty well all the way through. And is it safe for two partners to go it alone without anything but a guide?

Please do not mention my full name, only initials in *Adventure*."—F. C., Pearl Harbor, H. T.

*Answer*, by Mr. Miller:—West Africa, the part of Africa I cover, is quite unsuited for cattle-raising. In the interior there are partly tamed cattle, herded by nomadic tribes, but I never saw cattle in Nigeria whose ribs were covered. It is certainly not a white man's game.

As for taking your own horse there, that would be terribly expensive, and risky, for it is ten to one your mount would die in the fever belt. Horses can not live west of a certain line in Nigeria. In northern Nigeria good mounts can be bought for twenty to thirty dollars.

What you want to consider is British East Africa—up in the mountains toward Victoria Nyanza, where the climate is delightful, cattle thrive, and there is a market in Zanzibar, where, I think, they ship to England. The British Government offers every inducement to settlers.

But by no means take a horse all that way. You can buy on the spot. Take a saddle, yes, for saddles are expensive in Africa; and any old clothes you have, but don't outfit especially, as you can buy as cheap as or cheaper in the coast stores than elsewhere.

Write to Oversea Settlement Office, 59 Victoria St., London, S. W. 1, England, asking for all information as to land-grants and hunting-permits in British East Africa. They will send you all the information.

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### Rifle Cartridges for Revolvers?

HERE'S why it's best not to mix your ammunition and firearms:

*Question:*—"I read somewhere, in *Adventure* I think, that no great, if any, benefit was attained by using heavy powder charges in revolvers for the reason that "most of the powder is burned outside the muzzle, making a very loud noise but doing no great good" or words very like the above. I wish to get your opinion on this.

While inclined to think that the more powder the more power, I admit I can't see how the same powder charge would be of use in a barrel of twenty-four inches length and in one of one-fourth that length. That is, a rifle charge in a revolver. Take the .44 Winchester, for example; how can it be equally good for a rifle *and* a revolver? And yet I see the .45 Colt, a *very* standard revolver cartridge, has 38 grains of powder; the Winchester has only forty. According to the above theory the .44 Russian in a revolver would be as efficient as the .44 Winchester or the .45 Colt, and I am very doubtful if that is the case.

Do you think the Bisley model of the Colt S. A. A. is as good for all purposes as the regular S. A. A. model? The grip and the low hammer spur appeal to me. I note that the target Bisley costs much more than the regular Bisley, and all the difference I can see in the cuts is the target sights on the first named. Do you know if there are any other details in the target model, other than sights, that justify the increased cost? I thought there might be finer fitted lock-work or something like that.

Do you think the .44 Winchester in a Colt S. A. A. would be a good cartridge for target work, house defense and practise in quick drawing and snap shooting? Is it any good at the target?

I read and cut out to file your very conclusive reply in *re* the automatic in a late issue. *The* reason I will not touch an automatic is the timid one that I will not carry any pistol in which a hammer is cocked behind a live cartridge no matter how many safety 'doodads' are attached to same. I am too nervous. At the same time I don't like the double action as I find the effort drags the muzzle 'way off the mark; and I doubt if I ever could succeed in 'fanning' with the thumb of one hand. Looks to me as if I would have to invent a pistol for myself, the 'perfect' one.

From your article I would be inclined to think that an automatic would be very little inclined to jam if used as a house gun or at a target and kept oiled. You intimated more that they would fail in the field, I thought, where nature could get at them."
—JOHN RICHARDSON, Roslyn, L. I., N. Y.

*Answer*, by Mr. Wiggins:—*First:* I recommend that cartridges designed for the revolver be used therein, instead of rifle cartridges, as the latter are loaded with powders calculated for the longer barrels, and consequently are of slower burning properties than the revolver cartridges, loaded as such. In the black-powder loads the rifle shells seem to be loaded with the FFG powder, while the revolver cartridges, such as .32, .38 and .45 Colt and Smith & Wesson, are loaded with FFFG, a powder of finer size. The finer grain burns more swiftly, you see, and is all consumed in the short barrel of the revolver, while the coarse powder of the rifle shell burns some of the charge beyond the revolver muzzle. This is my theory; I may be wrong, however, but that's how I view it.

Smokeless the same way, although I find the Winchester make of smokeless rifle shells in .32, .38 and .44 W. C. F. loaded with powder that gives very fine results in both rifle and revolvers. Its worst feature in the revolver is the metal-cased bullets, both hard and soft points. I prefer plain lead in a revolver.

*Second:* I never liked the Bisley model as well as the regular S. A. Army Model Colt, but many prefer the Bisley, due to its design. I think the target models have a little more care used in assembling and finishing the lock parts than the regular models do. Either gun is very good for all-around work, to my mind.

*Third:* In selecting a single-action Colt for the uses you have mentioned, I would select a .44 Special or .45 Colt in preference to the .44-40, for the reasons given in No. 1. Both guns are very accurate, I find, and equally adapted to snap or target shooting.

*Fourth:* You seem to have trouble with most of the existing models of revolvers, so I am going to give a little unsought advice; if it fails to meet with your approval, it's all right anyway.

Why not try the Smith & Wesson revolver instead of the Colt? The S. & W. has a smaller grip and is more easily grasped by a small hand. Both revolvers are of the best material that it is possible to secure, and the design differs very little in the later models.

As to the automatics, I find the new model No. 51 Remington in the .380 caliber perfectly reliable, and like mine very much. But I still think that for rough work the S. A. Colt revolver is unsurpassed; there is about one chance in a thousand of anything but a broken part tying that gun up so it won't function, I believe.

***If you don't want an answer enough to enclose full return postage to carry it, you don't want it.***

### Trapping in Southeast Quebec

IF YOU expect to make a living at it, and it alone, you'd better stay away:

*Question:*—"I would like to ask you a few questions on trapping in southeast Quebec.

1. Could I hire a small cabin for two men, and at what price?
2. What part of southeast Quebec would you suggest for good trapping?
3. Where is the best place to obtain a trapper's outfit?
4. What size traps would you suggest for muskrats and mink? For fox and coon?
5. What is the price of a license?
6. What kind of an outfit would you suggest?

Enclosed you will find 3 cents postage for return answers."—PVT. ROY D. LINDSAY, Plattsburg, N. Y.

*Answer*, by Maj. Belford:—I am an old soldier myself, though with the Canadian push, not Uncle Sam's. And let me tell you in all soberness—forget the trapping.

Your letter shows you to be new to the game, and the old-timers are making very little. Prices of fur

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are not what they were. Trapping is all right as a side line, but as the sole support—don't chance it.

The ideal Nimrod is found everywhere. He knows the country. He has another occupation which feeds and clothes him, so that his trapping is velvet. And he doesn't leave much for you.

As to your questions, you could build your own cabin, or if you rented one it would cost simply a nominal sum, say five dollars for the season. Small traps for rats, a size larger for mink and a size still larger for fox. Beauce County should be about the best locality, or Frontenac. Remember the people are mostly French.

For game laws write E. T. D. Chambers, Parliament Buildings, Quebec City. You could get your outfit at the City of Sherbrooke, or in Montreal. You would need your blankets, stove, cooking-utensils, chopping and hand ax, rifle or shotgun, six to twelve dozen traps; grub, plain and substantial; and that's the most of it. But unless the financial end does not interest you—don't go.

***Free service (except our assaying and oil services) but we don't pay the postage to get it to you.***

### Wants to Be a Cattle Man

ONCE again: Please always send full reply postage and self-addressed envelop to the "A. A." man. Otherwise he doesn't have to answer, and likely as not he won't. Brother Middleton did this time; but he's good-natured. And another thing: Don't stick the return postage on the self-addressed envelop:

*Question:*—"I am taking the liberty of writing to ask you a few questions and for some information regarding the cattle industry in Montana and Wyoming. I have been through some of that country *via* automobile but did not see any ranches that were running any great number of cattle.

I should like to get into communication with a cattle man with whom I might make arrangements to work for a year or two, with the idea of getting some little insight into the business. The money end of it is not of very great importance, provided the remuneration will cover expenses. I should like to start with a man who would consider taking a partner if we were mutually agreeable. I am prepared to give any sort of references that may be required.

I shall be very grateful for any information you may be able to give me or for the names of any men who you think might be interested."—LELAND S. WILSON, Beverly, Mass.

*Answer*, by Mr. Middleton:—Montana is outside of my province, and as there is an "A. A." expert assigned to that territory, I refer to him—I am sure he will cheerfully answer any questions you may ask him—Mr. Chester C. Davis, Helena, Mont.

There are a number of large outfits running both cattle and sheep in Wyoming; guess you just didn't happen to run across them.

Your idea of working for a while and getting an insight into the cattle business is a fine one, and there is no doubt of your getting an opportunity to do so. Would like for you to write Mr. Roy Lockenour, of Glenrock, Wyo., telling him, as you did me, just what you want. This is in Converse County. You'll find Mr. Lockenour a gentleman.

Two other addresses are Mr. C. M. Cox, Cody, Wyo., and Mr. A. N. Davis, of Jackson, Wyo. I'd suggest writing all three of them, and I am sure you will get lined up all right. If I can be of any further service, don't hesitate to command me.

I must call your attention to the fact that you failed to comply with one of the rules of "Ask Adventure," namely, sending self-addressed envelop for reply, with return postage.

### Treasures of the *Huacas*

THREE hundred and seventy-odd years of constant search for the "big fish" of the Chimus, with its promise of wealth untold:

*Question:*—"I would like to know if an American twenty-six years old in good health could make a stake in Colombia or Peru without any capital for a starter. I have rambled in pretty near all the ports of importance on the globe, so I guess I could get there O. K. Following are some questions I would like to ask:

Is there any chance of finding any Inca relics in Peru, and in what locality?

Who found the small fish god?

Are there any prospects in the mining line?

How much does farmland cost in Colombia on the average?

Are there any possibilities of getting in with any mining concerns there?"—C. E. CARLSON, Everett, Wash.

*Answer*, by Mr. Young:—Am enclosing a list with the names of a few outfits in Colombia and Peru. The Tropical Oil Co., 54 Church St., Toronto, Ont. (Standard Oil), are doing some extensive work in Colombia at present and are shipping down experienced oil men at wages up to $350 per month. Their plant down there is in the construction stage, working on roads, tanks, pipe-lines, warehouses, etc., and sinking preliminary holes. Three of them are down to pay sand, and there are hundreds of others contemplated. They are paying clerks, timekeepers, etc., about $150 usually with room rent free. Now and then they hire a man who blows in, but they don't like to. The local manager is a Scotchman.

There are good chances of finding relics in Peru. The mention you make of the "small fish god" brings in Chimu and not Inca relics; for this *huaca* (tomb) was dug into near the crumbling edifices of Chan Chan near the present Trujillo. The Chimus had been conquered by the Incas a short time prior to the invasion of the Spaniards. I can do no better than quote Dr. Zahm about the "little fish."

"In the year 1550, a cacique of Mansiche—a pueblo adjoining Trujillo—Don Antonio Chayhuac, who had received the waters of baptism and was a legitimate descendant of the Great Chimu made known to the Spaniards a *huaca* (tomb) near the palace of Chimu Canchu, on condition that a part of the treasures that might be found there should be used for the benefit of the Indians under his jurisdiction. In consequence of this information, Garcia Gutierrez de Toledo discovered, in the *huaca*

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which has since borne his name, treasures that rivaled those of Monte Cristo. According to Feyjóo le Sosa, the amount of gold reported by the discoverer amounted to about three quarters of a million dollars; but he observes that there was a tradition that the amount secured was greatly in excess of this sum—'*fue excisivamente mayor el caudal que el que corresponde á los quintos.*'

"Middendorf estimates Toledo's find at a million dollars more than the amount given by Feyjóo, while Hutchinson's calculations based on the accounts found among the municipal records of Trujillo make the sum total of the treasure found by Toledo almost four and a half millions in gold.

"Unfortunately for the cacique of Mansiche and his people, the Spaniards failed to keep their contract and the Indians got nothing of this colossal pile of gold that had been collected by their forefathers. In the hope of securing something, the wily chief then told the Spaniards that he knew where there was concealed a similar, but much larger, treasure. So far, he declared, they had only found the *peje chico*—the little fish. There was still, he averred, the *peje grande*—the big fish—which represented an amount of gold incomparably greater than that furnished by the *peje chico*.

"Whether the Indian's story was true or merely a ruse to secure a part of the treasure to which he was entitled, the Spaniards made haste to secure the good will of the cacique and the information he pretended to be able to give. They accordingly made up for the benefit of himself and his people a collection amounting to more than forty thousand dollars. He then pointed out the place where he said the treasure was buried. Search for the *peje grande* was then begun without delay.

"The large *huacas* were honeycombed by excavators but with little result—except possibly in the case of one Escovar Corchuela, who, according to Calancha, secured no less than six hundred thousand dollars—until the latter part of the last century. Then a Chilean, Colonel La Rosa by name, described as "the most enthusiastic and persistent treasure-hunter of Trujillo, where rummaging for *tapadas*, or treasures, has been a passion," since the time of Toledo, began a quest for the fabulous "big fish." In the beginning he was rewarded by discovering gold objects of various kinds that netted him about thirty thousand dollars. The search for the *peje grande* now became a mania with him, and he devoted the greater part of the remaining years of his life to excavating *huacas* but with no result except the loss of all the money he had gained by his first stroke of good luck, and the posthumous honor of having one of the *huacas* in which he labored named after him.

"It is now three and a half centuries since the cacique of Mansiche announced the existence of the *peje grande*, and yet, notwithstanding all the fruitless attempts that have been made to find it, and the fortunes that have been squandered in excavations which yield nothing but a few trinkets and a countless number of skeletons, the quest for this legendary treasure still continues with the same feverish activity as it did in the days of Toledo and La Rosa, etc., etc."

***When you get something for nothing, don't make the other fellow pay the postage on it.***

### Books about Shipping

HERE'S a bibliography to paste in your hat, if you're interested:

*Question:*—"Please tell me titles of the best books to be read and where to get them covering your ground for *Adventure*. I would be very glad to be able to speak interestingly of these subjects."—NORBERT COTE, Willet, Ont., Can.

*Answer*, by Mr. B. Brown:—You would have to get a considerable library from which to acquire any working knowledge about the entire range of subjects on which I am presumed to furnish information. As a starter, on one branch of the subject I would recommend that you read, "Story of the American Merchant Marine," by Abbott, published by Dodd, Mead & Co., New York; "Steamships and Their Story," by Fletcher, published by J. B. Lippincott Co.; "Sailing-Ships and Their Story," by E. Keble Chatterton; "Ships and Ways of Other Days," by Chatterton; "Men of the Merchant Service," by Bullen. These, and the sea stories of Clark Russell, Conrad, Bullen, Herman Melville and Dana, will give you some insight into sea life. Your local bookseller can get these for you, or as many of them as you may desire.

### Snowshoes the Trappers Wear

ALSO a few tips on otter and beaver sets:

*Question:*—"What is the best snowshoe for the trap line in northwestern Wisconsin (Price Co.) amongst the poplar and alder bush and windfalls? Can you tell me the name of some good snowshoe and the firm that sells them?

What is the best way to get clams from creek-bed to look for pearls?

What is the best canoe for use in a creek?

Is there any ginseng in this part of country, and what is it like?

What is the best method of trapping beaver and other fur?"—A. S. CARLSON, Fifield, Wis.

*Answer*, by Mr. Spears:—Snowshoes are mostly a matter of taste, weight, habit and experience. For brush work, Adirondack trappers use bear-paw (oval) snowshoes. But the best trappers I know prefer a tail shoe, say 42 inches long and 10 inches wide, of rather coarse mesh. In light, loose snow, shoes up to 5 feet or more with turn-up toes are used.

Personally I like a long, rather narrow snowshoe. Northland Ski Mfg. Co., St. Paul, Minn., will suggest skis for your work. Abercrombie & Fitch, Inc., New York City, are important snowshoe dealers, who handle several types of snowshoes. Probably you can purchase snowshoes much cheaper of local Wisconsin makers than by sending away for them.

Any snowshoe in poplar, alders and windfalls makes hard traveling at the best. Strong bows, large mesh, tight harness, warm, comfortable footgear are the necessities, or at least desirables—shorter shoes for short-legged folk.

I enclose pearling and shelling slip.

As to canoes for narrow waters—10 or 12 foot long, canvas-covered close-set ribs and perhaps very

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thin planking—a light craft, flat rather than round bottom, and pretty wide; perhaps 30 to 34 inches.

Best otter set, in mouth of spring-run brook where empties into creek or lake where otter are. Wade at least 100 yards, or set from boat.

Set beaver traps in underwater hole, in runway, or in break in the dam—but don't leave any sign or scent of your work in either otter or beaver set. Gibson's "Camp Life and Tricks of Trapping" (Harper & Brothers, New York) and "Fur Trapper's Companion" (Peltries Pub. Co., 370 Seventh Ave., New York) are good trapping books.

For ginseng information, get "Medicinal Plants," A. R. Harding, Columbus, Ohio.

### Short Stirrup and Long

MR. WHITEAKER claims the honors for the long stirrup as being easier on the horse, at least in all-day range-riding. But Mr. Greene, of our staff—yes, he's the L. Patrick Greene whose stories you may have read in this magazine and others—says that he did his *veld*-riding with short stirrups, and maintains that both the British and American cavalry, as well as the English country gentleman who does his thirty miles a day riding to hounds, are of the same persuasion.* All right, boys, have it your own way, either or both of you. Me, the only riding I can do is on the street-car. Maybe the truth is that a good rider could go it either way without galling his mount, and that a fool rider couldn't do it both ways without:

*Question:*—"Can you give me information on the following:

How does a Westerner sit a trotting horse? I have seen them ride, and am of the opinion that they use a long stirrup and stand when the horse is trotting, leaving only a small space between them and the saddle. Is this right?

Is this method easier on the horse than posting to his trot?

Do you prefer a double or single girth saddle?

What is the correct way to cinch a saddle? Do you lace the cinch in and out of the girth rings, or do you wrap it directly around the rings?

Please do not print my name." —— ——, Pittsburgh, Penn.

*Answer*, by Mr. Whiteaker:—It is owing to the individual's taste as to how they ride; some prefer a short stirrup while others like them long. I use the long stirrup, long enough for just the ball of the foot to rest in and to give the proper spring to the body. In this way your body is in unison with the movement of the horse; better on you and easier on the horse.

When the stirrups are short your knees become stiff after being in the saddle a few hours, and you are inclined to press your knees against the muscles of the back part of the horse's shoulders. Your seat is very insecure; and usually after a day's riding the horse's back puffs up, and in rolling this puffed place is injured so that is the beginning of a set-fast or a running sore back. Keep yourself glued to the saddle and follow the movements of the horse and you need have no fear of causing his back to be sore.

In jumping a ditch, ravine, bush, etc., rise in the stirrups and bend forward. This assists the horse. He judges the distance by the weight of his fore part and so clears the obstacle easily.

It is easier on the horse to have your weight equally divided on his back so that is why it is better to have a firm seat in the saddle than to continually keep rising and sitting.

It is owing to the kind of horse that I am going to mount as to the number of girths. If the horse is a bit skittish or if I am going to rope a steer I want a double girth on the saddle; if the day is warm and the horse is gentle then a single girth will do, as it is not so discomforting to the horse as a double one, although it is not so easy on his back.

Take the girth strap and wrap it as you would tie a four-in-hand neck tie. In this way it is easy either to loosen the girth or to take it up more. Some of the straps are long enough to be wrapped three or four times; from the right-hand side of the ring or front part take the end of the strap to the back part of the ring and pass it through the ring, bringing the end directly in the center of the ring, making something like a four-in-hand tie. Pull up on the strap in the inner side and pull down on the end of the strap, thus making it tight and slip proof. I hope that you can get the drift—I would rather show than try to explain.

*Pat also says that the man with the best seat in the world is the west-of-Ireland hunting farmer.

### History of the Philippines

BROTHER CONNOR tells it on a flea's thumb-nail:

*Question:*—"Enclosed please find an addressed envelop, in which you will please send me the history and customs of the natives of the Philippine Islands."—MARGARET J. KLINE, Duquesne, Pa.

*Answer*, by Mr. Connor:—Your question is too much for me! I have no printed copies of history or customs of the islands.

But for a brief history: The islands were discovered by Magellan—the Great Navigator—in 1521 A.D., and were captured by the Spanish by 1572. Manila has been the capital since 1571.

When Spain dismissed the American Minister on April 21st, 1898, President McKinley ordered the Asiatic squadron under Commodore George Dewey to sail from Mirs Bay—near Hongkong—to Manila. Sunday, May 1st, 1898, will live in the hearts of the boys of that fleet as the day, when after a night vigil at their guns while passing into the inner channel of Corregidor fortifications, they took Cavite and the whole of Manila Bay, after a complete destruction of Montejo's Spanish armada. The entire group was by treaty conceded to the United States after a payment of $20,000,000, and later $2,000,000 more for small islands near Sandikan, British North Borneo.

The climate is about the same as Florida, California, or other countries whose latitude is from 5 to 21 North.

Have I answered to your satisfaction? If so, I am glad; if I haven't done so, state just what you desire, and I am yours to command.

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## Old Songs That Men Have Sung

am much indebted to Comrade Arthur S. olittle, of Watkins, N. Y., for the following bit verse which was asked for by one of the sitters-in ıund the Camp-Fire some months ago:

**Tim Finnigan's Wake**

m Finnigan lived in Walker Street,
ı Irish gentleman mighty odd,
:'d a beautiful brogue so rich and sweet,
ıd to rise in the world he carried the hod.
ıt you see he'd a sort of a tippling way;
ith a love for the liquor poor Tim was born,
ıd to help him through his work each day,
e'd a drop of the "craythur" every morn.

*Chorus*

Whack, hurrah! Dance to your partners!
Welt the flure; yer trotters shake!
Isn't it the truth I've told ye?
Lots of fun at Finnigan's wake!

ne morning Tim was rather full;
lis head felt heavy, which made him shake.
le fell from the ladder and broke his skull,
o they carried him home, his corpse to wake.
hey rolled him up in a nice clean sheet
nd laid him out upon the bed
Vith fourteen candles around his feet
nd a couple of dozen around his head.

*Cho.*

His friends assembled at his wake.
Missus Finnigan called out for the lunch;
First they laid in tay and cake,
Thin pipes and tibbacky and whisky punch.
Miss Biddy O'Neil began to cry,
"Sich a pretty corpse did ye ever see?
Arrah! Tim *mavourneen*, an' why did ye die?"
"Och, none of yer gab," sez Judy Magee.

*Cho.*

Then Peggy O'Connor took up the job:
"Arrah! Biddy," says she, "yer wrong, I'm sure."
But Judy then gave her a belt on the gob,
An' left her sprawling on the flure.
Each side in war did then engage;
'Twas woman to woman an' man to man.
Shillelah law was all the rage,
And a bloody ruction soon began.

*Cho.*

Mickey Mulvaney raised his head
When a gallon of whisky flew at him.
It missed him, and, hopping on the bed,
The whisky scattered over Tim!
Bedad! He revives! See how he raises!
An' Timothy, jumping from the bed,
Cried while he lathered around like blazes—
"Bad luck to yer sowls, d'ye think I'm dead?"

*Cho.*

---

Comrade C. W. Beauchamp of Baker, Lemhi Co., Idaho, has heard a song that caught his tuneful ear, called "When You Need a Cigaret," which is about all the time for some folks. Send it in, brothers, if you know anything of it.

---

Comrade Adam Prittie, of 417 East Pico St., Los Angeles, Calif., would like to know the name and the balance of the song, the verse of which follows:

No more I'll go a-roving and pack my blankets round;
I'll build myself a cabin on the banks of Puget Sound.

---

Comrade O. B. Germond, of Peel, Wash., would like to get on the track of a sea chantey which starts off like this:

I lived in Baltimore not very long ago,
I thought I'd take a trip to Rio Janeiro.
A Frenchman gave me the chance,
Likewise a month's advance,
And I shipped on the good ship *Campanero*.

---

One of our good sitters-in at the Camp-Fire would like to be put on the track of "The Pirate of the Yangtze." He says it's a good parlor bit. Any one know it?

---

A. J. Wallace, a good scout of Lorain, O., wants to know if any of you ever heard a cowboy song which started in thus, "The sun was sinking behind the hills just as the work was done." New to me.

---

Compadre M. C. Dean, of Pine Tree Inn, Virginia, Minn., would be grateful for a song called "Paul Jones, the Privateer," a salt-water ditty; likewise another of the same stripe, the name of which has slipped him, which runs thisaway, "One morning as I strolled ashore from my gallant brigantine," etc.

---

Compadre Raymond S. Spears of Little Falls, N. Y., is looking for a collection of deep-sea stuff that celebrated the exploits of the famous pirates of the Spanish Main, including the slave runners of the lower Mississippi from 1800 to 1820; also the darky songs peculiar to New Orleans, if there are any. Quite a large order, Raymond; but if any of we-uns hab got you sure can have. Don't all speak at once.

---

Comrade H. C. Gorman of Florence, Kansas, would like to get the words of "The Boston Burglar" and "I'm Going to Live, Anyway Till I Die." Small contributions thankfully received.

---

Comrade C. G. Crawford, of Michigan City, Ind., asked a few weeks ago for the name and location of a poem referring to a girl who clad hersel' in army uniform and went to war in order to be near her lover: I couldn't place it, but Comrade C. J. Lane of San Francisco has done it for me. The poem will be found in "Cowboy Songs," compiled by J. L. Lomax, and published by MacMillan & Co., New York, under the title of "The Wars of Germany." Almost any bookstore can supply the book. Thanks, comrade Lane.

---

Comrade Byron Squires of Eatonville, Wash., is on the warpath for a song entitled "A Picture from Life's Other Side." Sing high, you fellows; some of you must surely know this ditty.

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Comrade Albert I. Rose of 324 West 34th St., New York, is looking for a bit of verse referring to the escape of a prisoner up in the Canadian wilds from a Royal Mounted Police officer. The poem goes on to tell how these red-coated officers always get their man, and it carries the following line—

I left their land a-flyin' with a dead man in my shack.

---

Comrade J. A. Kelsey, 6001 Geary St., San Francisco, would be glad if any of you *compadres* would dig up the title and the complete song, of which the following is only a suggestion:

Long ago I was peaceful and happy, with dear loving friends ever near.
But now they are gone, and I'm left all alone with no one my pathway to cheer.
Only a poor old wanderer with no place to call my home, *etc.*

---

Comrade R. B. Freshour, 1312 Garden St., Alton, Ill., would like to find the words of "The Wabash Cannon-Ball"—another new one on the modest editor.

---

Comrade William Weber of St. Edward's College, Austin, Tex., is looking for a couple of ditties that seem to have gotten away from me: "The Dying Hobo" and "Clancy's Wooden Wedding." If I'm not mistaken I have already sent a S O S for the former but have received no replies. Awake, brethren—there are no birds in last year's nest.

---

Comrade R. W. Maloney of 4615 Malden St., Chicago, would like to be put on the trail of the two following presumably well-known regular-Army songs, neither of which I have ever heard: "Moonlight on the Rio Grande" and "The Night That Murphy Died."

---

Comrade A. K. Griffith, of Oklahoma City, Okla., sends in the following in answer to a recent query:

"Down amongst the fogies,
Tra la la la la,
Shootin' snipes and stogies,
Tra la la la la.
We are a jolly good bunch of bums;
We live like royal Turks.
We have good luck in bummin' our chuck—
And damn the man who works."

---

A communication from Yorkey Slim, somewhere here in New York, who forgot to give his address, asks for a couple of poems named respectively "The Devil's Ride" and "The Gila Monster Route." I am unfamiliar with the former. The latter may be found in the *Winter Annual*, 1921-22, of *Captain Billy's Whiz-Bang*, an interesting little periodical full of ginger and published by W. H. Fawcett, Robbinsdale, Minn. Here's hoping that Yorkey Slim is a steady reader of this modest column. Next time, Yorkey, put your address on your letter.

---

Appreciative acknowledgments are made herewith to Boni & Liveright, publishers, for "Anthology of Irish Verse" by Padraic Colum; also for "The Le Gallienne Book of English Verse," by Richard Le Gallienne; to G. Schirmer, music publishers, for "Bayou Ballads," by Mina Monroe; to Oliver Ditson Co., for "One Hundred English Folksongs," by Cecil J. Sharp.—ROBERT FROTHINGHAM, 745 Riverside Drive, New York.


# THE TRAIL AHEAD

## OCTOBER 30TH ISSUE

**Besides the complete novel mentioned on the second page of this issue the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:**

**THE TENTH MAN** — ***Robert Simpson***
He was" no bigger than a thruppenny bit;" but he could show the whole West Coast of Africa something at that.

**THE SEA-HAWK A Five-Part Story Part II** — ***Rafael Sabatini***
*Sakr-el-Bahr*, the Moslem leader, attends a Christian wedding feast.

**THE SONG OF MADAME** — ***Crosbie Garstin***
The life and death of "*Eat-'Em-Alive.*"

**PAPA'S BOY** — ***Robert V. Carr***
Campaigning against Aguinaldo.

**A BEAST OF NO ACCOUNT** — ***F. St. Mars***
The jackal plays his part.

**GETTING HIS "OWN" BACK** — ***R. D. Hemingway***
The bucko mate and the big boy.

**THE HAVEN OF FUR** — ***Theodore Seixas Solomons***
In the bitter arctic blizzard man and dogs cling to life beneath the snow-covering.

**ADOBE WALLS** — ***Frederick R. Bechdolt***
Behind the thin shelter of adobe walls the buffalo-hunters fight the Indians.


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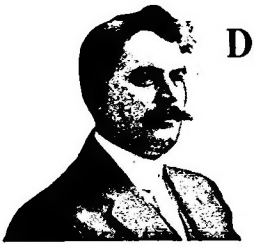
# Where Will You Be At 65?



**W. E. Brackett**
of Ohio frequently adds $50 a month to his income through magazine subscription work in his spare time

**Do you know that out of 100 men who are healthy at 25**

**36 will be dead at sixty-five**
**1 will be rich**
**4 will be wealthy**
**5 will be supporting themselves by work**
**54 will be dependent upon friends, relatives or charity?**

**Ralph Young**
of Ohio makes $125 a month just by giving two hours' work each day to his subscription business

# What Are You Doing
## to keep out of this dependent class?

BRACKETT, Young and hundreds of others are making money as our representatives. Why not join these men? They do not devote any special amount of time to the work. They work when they please, where they please, and as much as they please.

If you're this side of 65, now is the time to turn your spare time into dollars. If you are 65 and in the dependent class, you can get out of it. Your age doesn't matter. *Adventure, Everybody's, The Delineator* and *The Designer* offer you an opportunity to make $50.00 a month in your spare time—if you want to give all your time, $50.00 a week.

In 1922, more than five million people will read *Adventure* and our other three leading magazines. A big proportion of this business will come in direct to us because we haven't a sufficient number of representatives to look after it. You can easily secure a part of this business and share in the profits. If you want more money, let us tell you how you can get it.

There is no expense of any kind attached to our offer. We furnish you with all supplies and instructions absolutely free. No experience is necessary. You can begin earning money the day you hear from us. Return the coupon below for full particulars of our spare-time money-making plan.

**Mail this coupon today**

**Manager, Staff Agencies Division,**
**Box 873, Butterick Bldg., New York**

Dear Sir:

Please send me immediately, without obligation, all particulars concerning your practical plan to build up a permanent, profitable magazine subscription business of my own in my spare time.

*Name* .....

*Street* .....

*City* ..... *State* .....

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Peter Piper picked a pack of Pep-O-Mints,
A piquant pack of Pep-O-Mints Peter Piper picked;
Pete was piqued at pickles,
Said he, "I'll spend my nickels
For the candy mint that tickles."

Pep-O-mint
Wint-O-green
Lic-O-rice
Cl-O-ve
Cinn-O-mon

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